

RESOURCE

Workshops for parents: lessons learned from Projet Jeune Leader

ABOUT THIS RESOURCE

This document captures our lessons learned from delivering workshops for parents.



About Projet Jeune Leader

PJL is a youth-founded, youth-led, and youth-centered nonprofit organization established in Fianarantsoa, Madagascar. Since 2013, Projet Jeune Leader has delivered comprehensive sexuality education to young and very young adolescents (ages 10-16) in Madagascar's public middle schools, partnering closely with schools and school districts. To do this, we recruit dynamic young adults (aged 18-25) for their positive gender attitudes and potential as role models, train them rigorously over two months, and hire them under a full-time, paid contract if they pass an end-of-training assessment. We then integrate each of them into a partner public school where they teach a year-long, time-tabled CSE course to multiple grades using our age-segmented, gender-transformative, 27-module curricula. When they are not teaching, educators provide a package of other essential services (enrichment activities, counseling, medical referrals, and programs for parents and teachers).

About the Guidance Tool: *CSE We Can Count On*

Projet Jeune Leader has developed “CSE We Can Count On,” a publication sharing strategies, actionable guidance, and tools that we use in our work with tens of thousands of students, parents, teachers, and school officials in Madagascar to build and harness community support for in-school comprehensive sexuality education. This document, which accompanies the guidance tool, shares one of the resources that we use regularly.



Read “CSE We Can Count On” and accompanying resources at www.projetjeuneleader.org/resources/community-support.

The uses and success of this resource are undeniably dependent on the context in which CSE is being delivered. Even so, we hope that it serves as a source of inspiration and creativity for others – civil society organizations, international non-governmental organizations, and even governments – committed to delivering in-school comprehensive sexuality education in their own contexts.

Summary

Projet Jeune Leader (PJL) organized workshops for 2,832 parents in May, June, and July 2021. The workshops aimed to help parents build the skills and confidence to have open discussions about sex and puberty as well as to help them build trusting relationships with their teenagers. For the first time in our history of organizing workshops for parents, PJL Educators were the ones to lead the workshops in their partner schools (previously, a member of the technical team had been in charge of this activity). A quantitative and qualitative evaluation was conducted to measure whether participants acquired new knowledge and attitudes following participation in the workshop. The data also provided us parents' feedback on the PJL Educator's facilitation skills. The assessment showed that the workshops led by the PJL Educator were effective: parents were convinced of the importance of having open discussions with their children regarding issues of sexual health and puberty; they understood which behaviors and which communication strategies they should adopt to better support their teenagers; and they expressed appreciation for how the educators conducted the workshops. From this experience, we also gained lessons learned regarding how to better support our educators conducting these workshops in the future.

Context

Young adolescents are Projet Jeune Leader's primary targets. However, the organization has been offering workshops for parents on school premises since 2016, given that parents play a key role in reinforcing the messages on sexual health and puberty that teenagers receive from PJL educators. Parents can also provide advice and support to adolescents outside of school settings.

In general, we hold the workshops on weekends and the number of attendees is capped at 30. Each session lasts three hours including discussion and group work. Each parent is provided with refreshments (a pack of biscuits and juice) and a booklet with the key messages at the end of the workshop.

In the past, the workshops had always been delivered by a dedicated staff member from Projet Jeune Leader. However, this approach was not feasible at scale. Projet Jeune Leader works with public secondary schools in three remote regions of Madagascar, making it impossible for one person to organize one parents' workshop per year in every school.

Thus, Projet Jeune Leader decided to try a new approach by having the PJJ Educators already working in secondary schools deliver the workshops. In May, June, and July 2021, Projet Jeune Leader's 50 Educators were sent in pairs or groups of three to the 45 schools in the regions of Haute Matsiatra, Amoron'i Mania, and Vakinakaratra to deliver workshops for parents. They conducted two or three workshops in each school depending on the size of the school and the parents' level of interest. In all, the educators conducted 104 workshops, with 2,083 parents attending (2,183 mothers and 649 fathers).

Assessing the new approach

The objective of the evaluation was to determine whether having the PJJ Educators conduct the workshops improved the knowledge and attitudes of participants and whether parents appreciated the new approach.

The assessment findings helped Projet Jeune Leader decide whether the approach should be maintained in the future as well as draw lessons to make improvements to future programming.

Evaluation methods

Surveys

At the end of each workshop, all the PJJ Educators distributed a survey to participants, asking them to use a bean to anonymously answer the following question: "How useful to

The workshops focus on the following topics:

1. Physical and emotional changes during puberty. The objective is to remind parents that adolescence is a difficult period, that every adolescent experiences it in their own way, that boys and girls go through emotional changes during this period, and that the changes are induced by hormonal changes.

2. Adolescents' behaviors during puberty. The objective is to explore two typical behaviors adolescents demonstrate with their parents. On the one hand, they tend to hide things and withdraw from their parents; on the other hand, they think they know it all and seek independence.

3. Ineffective behaviors parents take with their adolescent children. The objective is to analyze five ineffective behaviors of parents and their impact on adolescents: "when parents are too anxious," "when parents are too strict," "when parents are too critical," "when parents are too distracted," and "when parents are preachy."

4. Characteristics of model parents and open-mindedness. The objective is to describe the characteristics of an open-minded parent and understand how this behavior impacts adolescents.

your life is what you learned today?” (Useful/ Not useful/ I don’t know).¹ All 2,832 parents took part in the survey. The PjL Educators also asked some parents to share their answers and explain the reasons for their choices after the survey.

We also conducted a second survey in Vakinakaratra region, similar to the first one, but utilizing a different question: “Are you going to talk about puberty to your children?” (Yes, I am going to / No, I don’t plan to / I don’t know).² In all, 870 parents took part in the second survey. The team also asked some volunteers to share their answers and the reasons for their choices after the survey.

Observations

Members of Projet Jeune Leader’s technical team attended and passively observed the workshops in schools. Each observing staff member filled out a feedback form regarding the PjL Educator’s workshop facilitation.

Meetings with the PjL Educators

Our team held in-depth discussions with the educators at the end of their workshops.

In-depth interviews with parents

Our team held in-depth discussions with 35 randomly selected participants.

Evaluation findings

According to the findings from the quantitative and qualitative evaluation, the workshops generated several positive changes in terms of participants’ knowledge, attitudes, and behaviors.

Among the parents in the first survey, 98% reported that what they learned in the workshop would be useful for them in their lives. As some of them explained:

“This training will help me a lot with my three children. It’s a real challenge to raise the second one, and I learned the right approach to deal with him during the workshop.” - Mother of a student at Ambalamahasoa middle school

¹ « Mahatsapa ve ianao fa hanampy anao amin’ny fiainana ny zavatra nianaranao androany ? »

² « Vonona ve ianao ny hiresaka mahakasika ny fiantsakana amin’ny zanaka? »

"I think this training will help me: it has helped me understand my children's behaviors. In addition, I've come to understand the mistakes I have made in the way I raised them. Finally, this training has inspired me and now, I know how to act as a role model." - Mother of a student at Ankaramena middle school

"This training has taught me a lot about my child's attitudes and behaviors during puberty. What he is going through is normal, and I am the one who should take steps to improve our relationship." - Father of a student at Lovainjafy middle school

The evaluation feedback also helped us identify what new knowledge parents acquired through the workshops. Parents most frequently mentioned the following:

Scientific understanding of puberty

"Before the workshop, I was not aware that the changes during puberty are caused by hormones and are normal. Before, I couldn't understand them. Now I know a lot about the topic." - Mother of a student at Lovainjafy middle school

Adolescent behaviors and ways of managing those behaviors, including through listening and empathy

"I have nine children and I observed that they are very different from one another. Fortunately, this training has taught me about the importance of using different strategies with each one of them." - Mother of a student at Alakamisy Itenina middle school

"After this training, I am now able to listen to my child and take his opinion into account. Whenever he makes wrong decisions, I will be able to gently correct him." - Mother of a student at Lovainjafy middle school

"I am ready to listen to my children and stop being so authoritarian in the way I raise them." - Mother of a student at Ankaramena middle school

Ability to self-assess one's parenting skills and take responsibility for one's mistakes

Many parents admitted that they always blamed their children for things that happened. They didn't understand that is ineffective to express anxiety and aggression with children or to be overly strict with them.

"I learned many new things here, including that when there is an argument, I should not put the blame only on my children. I should also acknowledge my mistakes." - Mother of a student at Ambalakely middle school

“This training made it clear to me that I may be the cause of the poor relationship between my children and myself and that the way I behave may cause my children to misbehave.” - Mother of a student at Andranovorivato middle school

“The training made me acknowledge that there are deficiencies in the way I raise my children. Now, I know how to improve and how I can better raise them.” - Mother of a student at Ankaramena middle school

“Through the workshop, I realized that I gave too much freedom to my children and I have to change that and do better.” - Father of a student at Ankaramena middle school

Several parents shared that they had never attended such a workshop before: *“We have never had any training on how to educate and raise children other than now with Projet Jeune Leader.” - Father of a student at Ankaramena middle school*

“It was a lot of fun. And the training was interesting. I had never experienced a workshop like this in my whole life.” - Mother of a student at Alakamisy Itenina middle school

The parents who reported not finding the training useful – 2% of the survey respondents – explained that they first need to practice what they learned and probably need another training to build their confidence and then improve. During individual interviews, many parents also expressed the desire to learn more about menstruation and early sex as well as techniques to initiate discussion about these topics with their children. We are taking this feedback into account as we prepare the curriculum for the next round of workshops for parents.

The workshops aimed not only to share new knowledge with parents but also to ensure that they felt confident enough to put what they learned into practice. In the second survey, **97% of the parents indicated that they planned to talk about puberty with their children after attending the workshop:**

“I am now ready to discuss puberty and sexuality with my children. In fact, through the training, I realized that if my older daughters haven’t been very successful in life because they married too early, it is because I sent them to talk with their mother whenever they approached me to talk about these topics. I thought these topics were taboo and it was their mother’s responsibility to talk about these, not mine. Now, I understand I have made a mistake: I am going to speak about puberty, menstruation, and the dangers of early sex with my youngest daughter.” - Father of a student at Ankaramena middle school

“I will talk about puberty with my children as soon as I get home. I will not wait any longer to talk about this topic to prevent all these problems, like pregnancy and early sex.” - Father of a student at Mahasoabe middle school

“I am ready to talk about puberty to my children. I am now convinced that it is crucial that fathers do it themselves.” - Father of a student at Antsoatany middle school

During individual interviews, some parents said that before the training, they considered it taboo to discuss topics of sex with a child of the opposite sex (mother with son, or father with daughter) and not appropriate in Malagasy culture. However, they shared that through the workshops, they came to understand that such discussions are really needed if they want their children to adopt healthy behaviors:

“I learned new things about topics that I used to see as taboo. I used to think that fathers should not talk about sex and puberty with their daughters, but after the training, I am convinced that such a discussion can take place between me, my husband, and my daughter. I mean both fathers and mothers can talk about menstruation with their daughters. It doesn’t have to be me alone anymore.” - Mother of a student at Mahasoabe middle school

“I have never talked about menstruation with my daughter, but today, I have learned that I don’t have to feel uncomfortable about having an open discussion on the topic with her: I will be actually teaching her the right behavior and knowledge. That’s new to me!” - Father of a student at Andranovorivato middle school

“I commit to applying what I have learned today and to becoming a more open-minded role model for my children. The training has inspired and encouraged me.” - Father of a student at Ankaramena middle school

Less than 1% of the parents (8 out of 870) indicated in the survey they were not going to speak about the workshop topics with their children, and 2% (14 of 870) were reluctant to do so. Their rationale was that their community values and customs make it difficult to discuss the topics.

The quantitative and qualitative evaluations showed that the PJL Educators had the skills and abilities needed to effectively conduct the workshops. In the observation forms filled out by the Projet Jeune Leader’s technical team, 90% of the PJL Educators were rated as “excellent” or “above average” in regard to their technical capacity³ to lead the training, and 85% were rated “excellent” or “above average” in regard to their adult education capabilities, as illustrated in the reflections of two Projet Jeune Leader staff members:

³ Scoring the three dimensions of adult education: ability to encourage participating parents, receptiveness to the reactions and questions of the parents, management of participants

“The PjL Educators were very capable conducting the training. They familiarized themselves with the instruction guide and completed all the activities. They were dynamic.” - Hanitra, PjL Technical Manager in Vakinankaratra

“The PjL Educators were dynamic and well-organized. The parents reacted well to the topics and the activities thanks to the good teaching skills of the PjL Educators.” - Liliane, PjL Communication and Advocacy Manager

During the interviews, parents shared that they liked having the PjL Educators facilitating the workshops. Projet Jeune Leader was initially concerned that parents would not give much credit to the educators due to their young age and the fact that they do not have children of their own. However, almost all parents interviewed indicated that they felt fine with the selection of facilitator and even thought that the PjL Educators were particularly well-positioned to deliver the workshops thanks to their teaching and facilitation skills:

“The PjL Educators have better training strategies as they take into account their audience’s level of education. The messages got through.” - Mother of a student at Lovainjafy middle school

“As I see it is, the PjL Educators have good skills to conduct trainings like this one.” - Mother of a student at Sahamadio middle school

As an unexpected benefit, parents have come to trust the PjL Educators more when it comes to educating their children: *“The parents developed more trust in the PjL Educators through participating in the workshop.”* - Mamisoa, PjL Technical Manager in Haute Matsiatra

“Now that we see how capable and skilled they are, we have no longer any concerns. We trust them with the education of our children at school.” - Father of a student at Andranomanelatra middle school

Lessons learned

Through the interviews with the PjL Educators themselves, we received a number of suggestions on how to improve the next round of workshops.

Provide PjL Educators with more training on how to communicate with adults and on co-facilitation techniques. During class observations, the Regional Technical Manager noted that some of the educators lacked self-confidence. It would have been better, prior to training, to build their skills in these areas as these are not

addressed in their work with middle school students.

Have school directors stamp invitations to workshops. Several methods were used to advertise the workshops and enroll people: announcements at meetings with the parents, door-to-door visits, and invitation cards sent to parents through their children. While this last method in particular was effective, the PJJ Educators thought it would be better to have the invitation cards signed and stamped by school directors to give parents assurance that the workshops are legitimate.

Change the survey tool in Vakinankaratra region. Custom dictates that beans must not be used for non-feeding purposes in some of sites where the Projet Jeune Leader operates, especially in the Vakinankaratra region. It would be better to use beads or other materials for polling at the end of workshops.

Hold workshops on weekdays, not only on weekends. Many parents expressed interest in the workshops, but, as the PJJ Educators would later learn, many of them – especially those in rural areas – are not available on Saturdays because they are busy with family duties, traditional events, and church.

Conclusion

The qualitative and quantitative evaluation of the 104 workshops for parents led by PJJ Educators showed that participants acquired new knowledge and attitudes, and that they are ready to apply what they learned at home. The participants enjoyed learning from the PJJ Educators, who proved that they were skilled at delivering the workshops. Based on the success of this pilot year, Projet Jeune Leader's technical team decided to continue using PJJ Educators as facilitators for future parents' workshops. This will allow us to scale up the workshops and encourage more parents to understand and support their adolescent children through puberty.



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