

*Life in the Family: A Newcomer's Guide to Parenting Issues in Canada:
Curriculum for ESL Classes*

Developed by: BC Institute Against Family Violence

A Review of the Curriculum Package by Debbie Storie

This practical, well-organized curriculum deals with issues that come up time and time again especially with immigrant women in Canada. It is divided into three parts: Looking After Each Other, Discipline in the Family and Intervention. The lessons spiral and build on each other to give the learners a chance to gain in depth knowledge of the rights and responsibilities of parents in Canada, and how Canadian law affects the way parents interact with their children.

This resource package would be suitable for use with learners at the Canadian Language Benchmarks Stage II (Intermediate Proficiency) levels, although many activities could easily be adapted for use at other levels. The curriculum includes a balance of activities (reading, writing, listening and speaking) within each part, an answer key, information for the teacher about Canadian law, a list of referral agencies organized by province, and a complete script for the accompanying video.

Each of the three parts in the package has a pre-video warm-up, a five-minute videotaped scenario, comprehension questions about the scenario, an interactive oral activity, a writing activity, a reading exercise, and a vocabulary exercise.

Although the actors speak clearly, the first two video segments are fast paced, so a teacher would definitely need to plan on showing them several times. The dialogues are realistic and use everyday expressions, and would also lend themselves well to a discussion of how emotion is manifested in our body language. Many of the scenarios will hit close to home (e.g. a father using physical force to discipline his child, young children being left responsible for younger siblings), so the teacher must know his/her students well, and be prepared for the types of discussion that are likely to be stimulated from the video.

I am especially impressed with the comprehension sheets, which include a good balance of factual questions as well as ones requiring inference and prediction. Learners are required to think for themselves;

they are asked not only "What would you do?" but also "What would result if you did that?" As well, several activities require the learners to separate their opinion from someone else's, and to discuss both sides of an issue. Had the curriculum developers included suggestions to teachers for the 'What would you do?' sections, this could help kick start the discussion, particularly for teachers who don't have personal experience raising children.

I would recommend pre-teaching some of the vocabulary, and adding some favorite vocabulary games or practice activities, as much of it is quite specific to this topic and would require more than just one matching or crossword sheet.

The guide is practical and user-friendly. Copying of worksheets and readings is not only allowed, but actually encouraged, as the *BC Institute Against Family Violence Society (BCIFV)* works to increase public awareness and understanding of family violence. An added bonus for those who are watching the number of copies we make, either for environmental or economic reasons, is that many activities could easily be done on a blackboard or overhead projector. I personally don't like the notes to the teacher being included on the same page as an activity. It always makes me think we look a little incompetent; therefore, I would cut those off before photocopying.

The few minor typos within the package don't detract in any way from the quality of this long overdue resource.

In conclusion, this is a very informative and thought-provoking curriculum that deals with relevant issues. I recommend its use for those working with adult newcomers to Canada. And the best thing about it it's available free of charge from the BCIFV web site www.bcifv.org or by calling toll free 1-877-755-7055.

About the reviewer:

Debbie Storie currently teaches Adult ESL at Red River College Language Training Centre. In 1992 she taught her first English in the Workplace course where she discovered the joy of being able to meet people's immediate language needs. She has also taught an ESP course for Childminders and CBLT women's classes. Debbie has recently received her TESL Canada Permanent Certificate Level 3.