

## Guidelines for Parenting Skills Enhancement Programs

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### OVERVIEW

The development of a citywide parenting education and support network is a major goal of the Department of Human Services (DHS). This effort is being led by the Parenting Collaborative under the auspices of the Division of Community-Based Prevention Services (DCBPS). All parenting education and support programs supported with DHS funding are part of this citywide network.

This initiative is an essential component of the effort of DHS to increase our focus on the prevention of child abuse, neglect and delinquency. The *Blueprint for Excellence: A Roadmap for Reform* outlines our efforts to improve our performance and the performance of the system we support in accomplishing our common mission:

- To protect children from abuse, neglect, and delinquency; ensure their safety and permanency in nurturing home environments; and strengthen and preserve families by enhancing community-based prevention services.
- To provide services, in partnership with community organizations, to strengthen the overall well being of Philadelphia children, youth, and families using a customer focused approach that is responsive to evolving community needs.
- To develop and implement policies and programs to continuously improve, measure, and achieve positive outcomes for children; manage public resources efficiently; communicate with customers and the general public; and integrate systems in order to effectively deliver services to children and families.

In December 2000, DHS established the Division of Community-Based Prevention Services to better coordinate the Department's wide array of preventive services to children and families in Philadelphia. The Parenting Collaborative is one component of DCBPS designed to coordinate a broad spectrum of parenting education and support services and has obtained input and support from a large number of public and private partner agencies.

In addressing this priority, DHS seeks to enhance the capacity of existing community institutions used by families to provide parenting education and support services. Particular effort is being made to expand parenting education

and support services to specific populations of parents and caregivers, and to establish a system of community-based services that will give priority to families and caregivers referred by DHS and its affiliated provider agencies.

In planning this effort, the Department of Human Services commissioned a research review on best practices in parenting education and support. This review provided information about the effectiveness of parent support and education as a strategy to promote children's well-being, and made recommendations about promising approaches based on research evidence.

We have adopted a broad definition of parenting programs, to include an array of educational and support services aimed at parents (and caregivers) and designed to promote children's well-being and safety through increasing the strength and stability of families, increasing parental confidence and competence, and affording children a stable and supportive home environment.

Our objective in supporting community-based parenting education and support programs is to enhance parent-child relationships by reinforcing supportive behaviors of parents and seeking to change non-productive or harmful behaviors. Through these programs, parents and caregivers are supported in developing and enhancing their parenting skills, improving their understanding of child development, trying alternative approaches to child-rearing, and learning techniques that reduce the stress that can undermine parental functioning.

Sustained efforts are needed in an array of areas to help realize the goal of supportive, stable families. Families need, in addition to economic independence, health care, housing, education, early childhood education and after-school programs, and safe communities, services to support parents and caregivers so that they in turn may foster the healthy development of young children.

Strong parenting support and education programs can improve the positive outcomes that we seek for Philadelphia's children and youth, their families and the broader community. There are many other endeavors that are ongoing in the City of Philadelphia that are designed to enhance the quality of children's lives, the lives of their families, and the community in which they live.

DCBPS seeks to integrate the work of the Parenting Collaborative with efforts such as literacy programs, health outreach programs, child care resource and referral services, behavioral health services, and a variety of other services to enrich the lives of Philadelphia's families.

Many and varied approaches have been used in parenting support and education programs. Parents can receive educational materials on healthy child development and care, they can attend presentations on parenting issues, and they can receive support and information through regular meetings or in a variety of different settings. Parents can learn new ways to support their child's reading and study skills, and constructive ways to manage their own and their child's behavior.

To date, there is no one agreed-upon model for parenting education and support that applies to all communities and families. Further, unlike early childhood education, which has a set of agreed-upon best practice standards based on research, there is at present no real consensus on a detailed set of formal standards that could apply to all parenting education and support services, Nor is there one endorsed model of providing these services.

Through the Parenting Collaborative, the DCBPS hopes to facilitate a partnership among public and private agencies that will identify standards of high-quality parent support and education practice for Philadelphia.

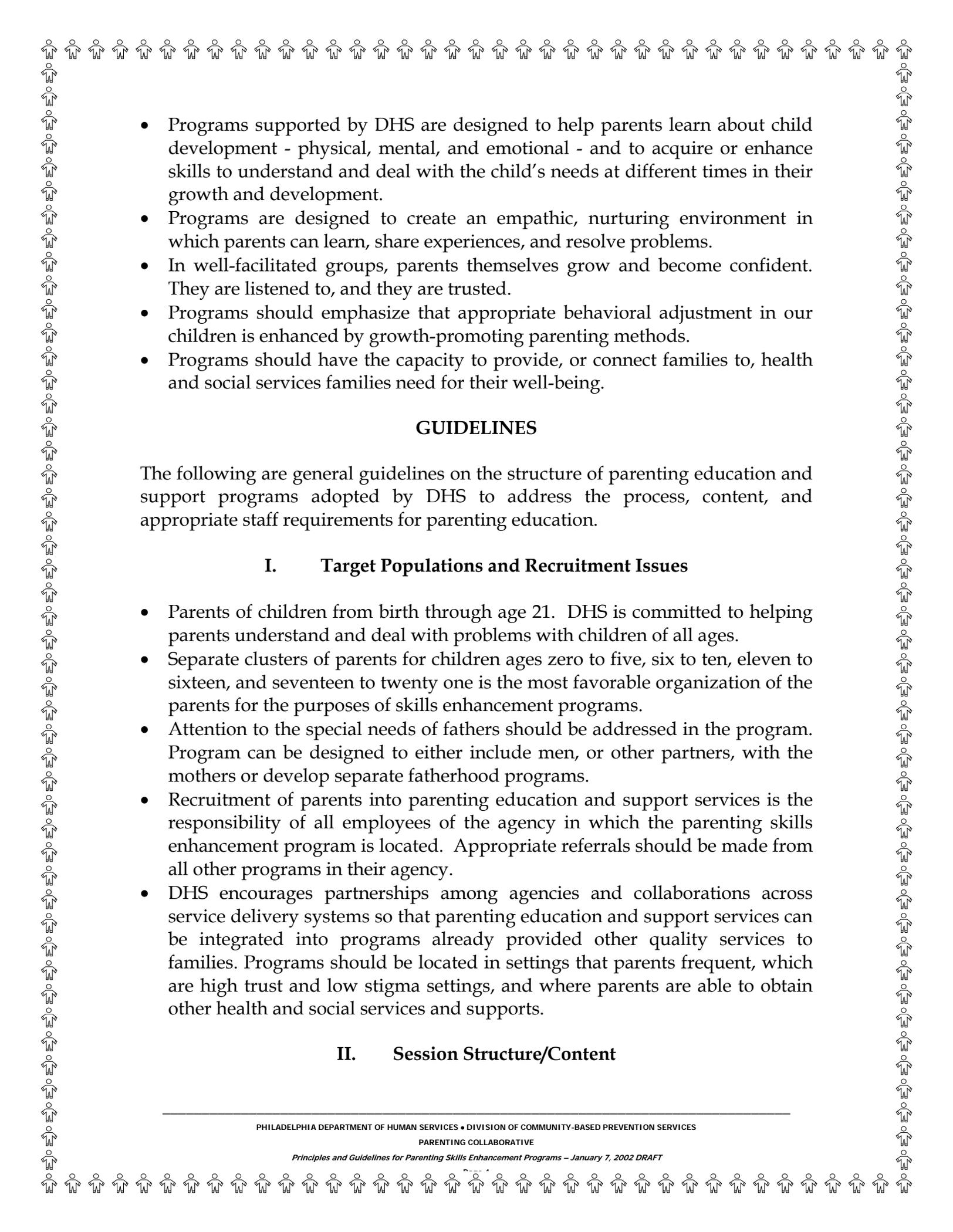
## GOALS AND OUTCOMES

The primary goal of the citywide parenting education network is the prevention of child abuse/neglect and interpersonal violence through parent education and support programs which enhance the parent/caregiver's ability to:

- Promote children's development,
- Improve child/parent attachment,
- Improve child/parent communication skills,
- Enhance self-esteem of participants,
- Improve child/parent social control, and
- To reduce aggressive behaviors by children and their caregivers.

## PRINCIPLES

- DHS is committed to helping families to become strong and able to be true resources for all members of the family. Strong families make strong communities.
- Programs supported by DHS affirm and strengthen the family's cultural, racial, and linguistic identity and enhance the family's ability to function in a multicultural society.

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- Programs supported by DHS are designed to help parents learn about child development - physical, mental, and emotional - and to acquire or enhance skills to understand and deal with the child's needs at different times in their growth and development.
  - Programs are designed to create an empathic, nurturing environment in which parents can learn, share experiences, and resolve problems.
  - In well-facilitated groups, parents themselves grow and become confident. They are listened to, and they are trusted.
  - Programs should emphasize that appropriate behavioral adjustment in our children is enhanced by growth-promoting parenting methods.
  - Programs should have the capacity to provide, or connect families to, health and social services families need for their well-being.

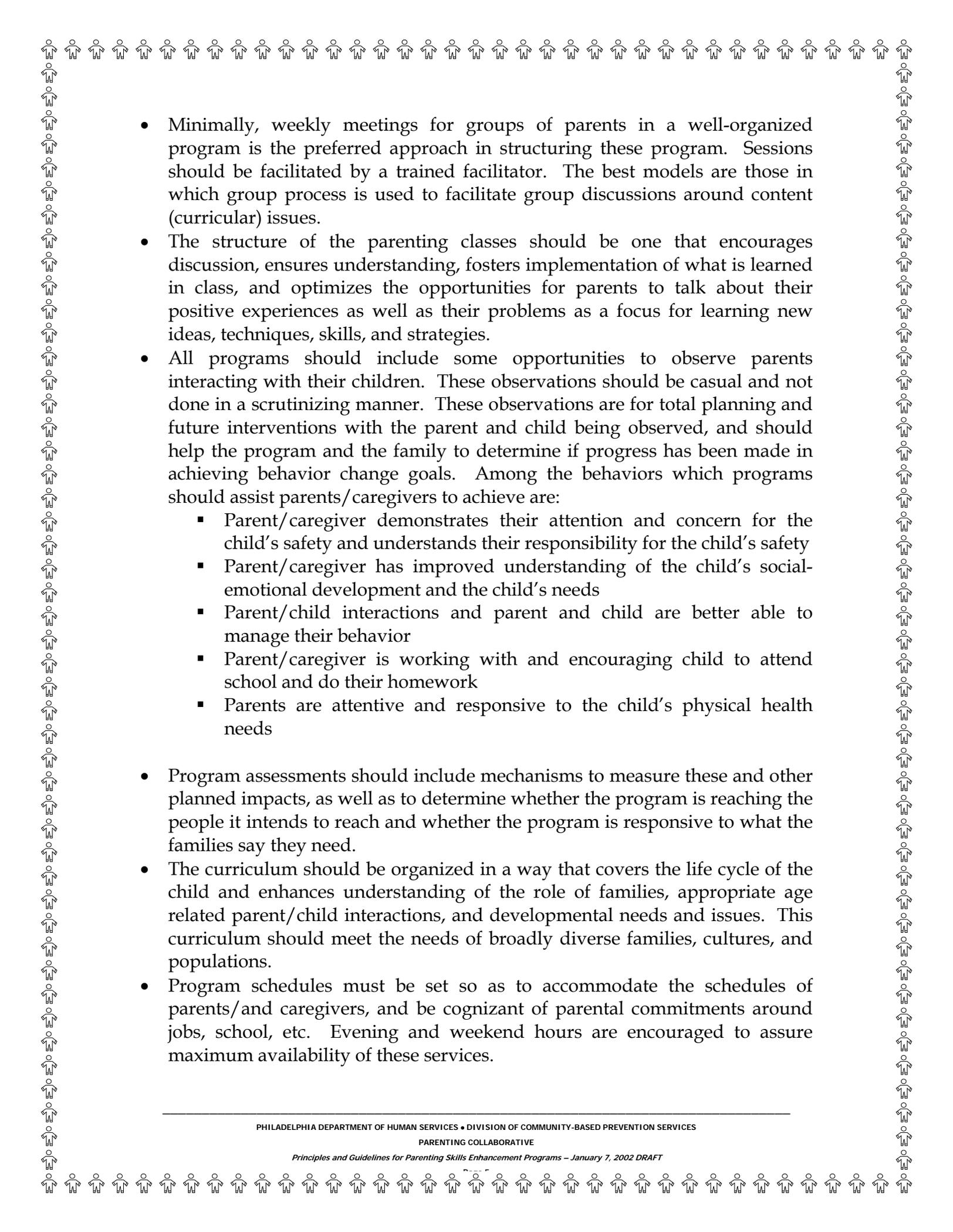
## GUIDELINES

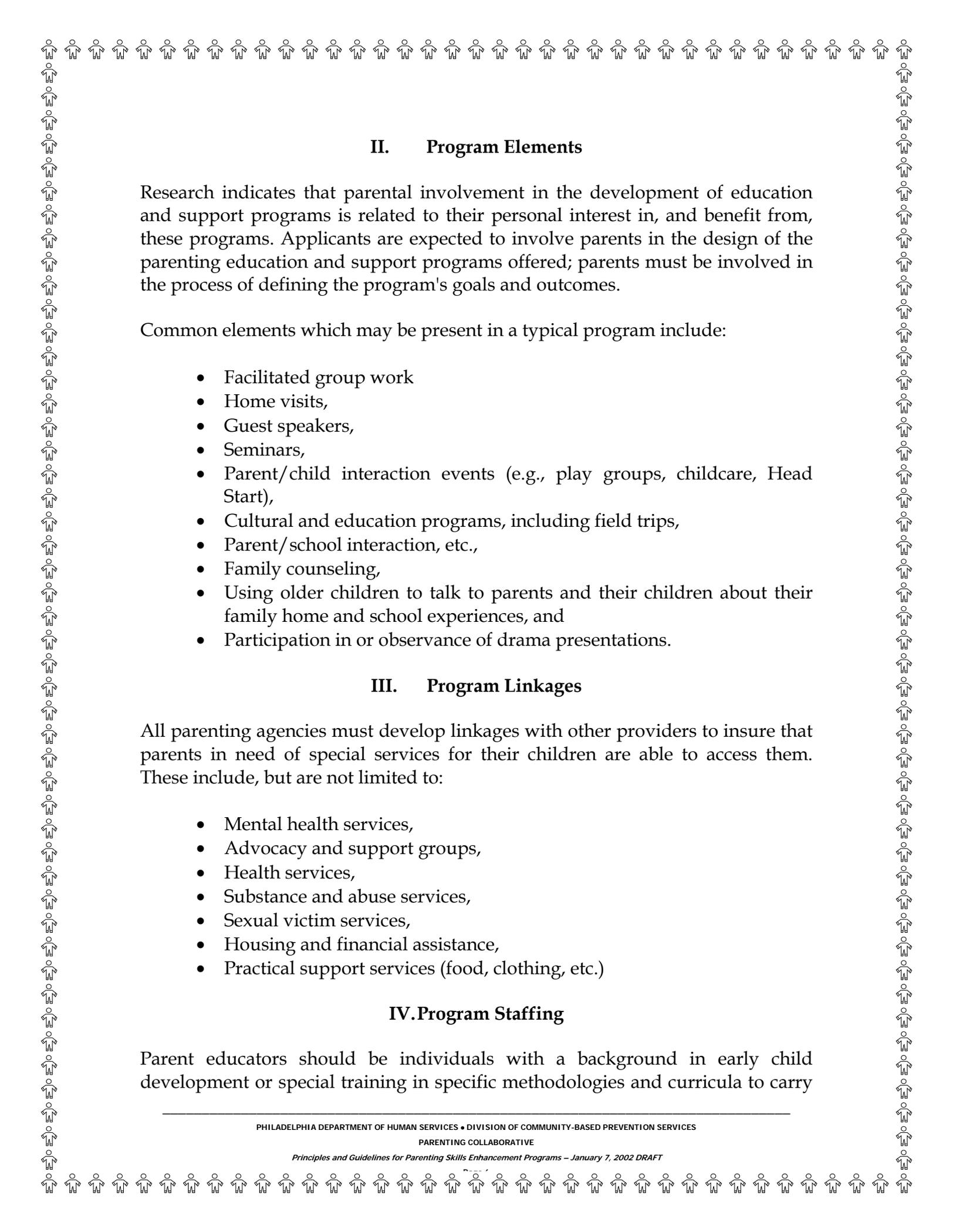
The following are general guidelines on the structure of parenting education and support programs adopted by DHS to address the process, content, and appropriate staff requirements for parenting education.

### I. Target Populations and Recruitment Issues

- Parents of children from birth through age 21. DHS is committed to helping parents understand and deal with problems with children of all ages.
- Separate clusters of parents for children ages zero to five, six to ten, eleven to sixteen, and seventeen to twenty one is the most favorable organization of the parents for the purposes of skills enhancement programs.
- Attention to the special needs of fathers should be addressed in the program. Program can be designed to either include men, or other partners, with the mothers or develop separate fatherhood programs.
- Recruitment of parents into parenting education and support services is the responsibility of all employees of the agency in which the parenting skills enhancement program is located. Appropriate referrals should be made from all other programs in their agency.
- DHS encourages partnerships among agencies and collaborations across service delivery systems so that parenting education and support services can be integrated into programs already provided other quality services to families. Programs should be located in settings that parents frequent, which are high trust and low stigma settings, and where parents are able to obtain other health and social services and supports.

### II. Session Structure/Content

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- Minimally, weekly meetings for groups of parents in a well-organized program is the preferred approach in structuring these program. Sessions should be facilitated by a trained facilitator. The best models are those in which group process is used to facilitate group discussions around content (curricular) issues.
  - The structure of the parenting classes should be one that encourages discussion, ensures understanding, fosters implementation of what is learned in class, and optimizes the opportunities for parents to talk about their positive experiences as well as their problems as a focus for learning new ideas, techniques, skills, and strategies.
  - All programs should include some opportunities to observe parents interacting with their children. These observations should be casual and not done in a scrutinizing manner. These observations are for total planning and future interventions with the parent and child being observed, and should help the program and the family to determine if progress has been made in achieving behavior change goals. Among the behaviors which programs should assist parents/caregivers to achieve are:
    - Parent/caregiver demonstrates their attention and concern for the child's safety and understands their responsibility for the child's safety
    - Parent/caregiver has improved understanding of the child's social-emotional development and the child's needs
    - Parent/child interactions and parent and child are better able to manage their behavior
    - Parent/caregiver is working with and encouraging child to attend school and do their homework
    - Parents are attentive and responsive to the child's physical health needs
  - Program assessments should include mechanisms to measure these and other planned impacts, as well as to determine whether the program is reaching the people it intends to reach and whether the program is responsive to what the families say they need.
  - The curriculum should be organized in a way that covers the life cycle of the child and enhances understanding of the role of families, appropriate age related parent/child interactions, and developmental needs and issues. This curriculum should meet the needs of broadly diverse families, cultures, and populations.
  - Program schedules must be set so as to accommodate the schedules of parents/and caregivers, and be cognizant of parental commitments around jobs, school, etc. Evening and weekend hours are encouraged to assure maximum availability of these services.



## II. Program Elements

Research indicates that parental involvement in the development of education and support programs is related to their personal interest in, and benefit from, these programs. Applicants are expected to involve parents in the design of the parenting education and support programs offered; parents must be involved in the process of defining the program's goals and outcomes.

Common elements which may be present in a typical program include:

- Facilitated group work
- Home visits,
- Guest speakers,
- Seminars,
- Parent/child interaction events (e.g., play groups, childcare, Head Start),
- Cultural and education programs, including field trips,
- Parent/school interaction, etc.,
- Family counseling,
- Using older children to talk to parents and their children about their family home and school experiences, and
- Participation in or observance of drama presentations.

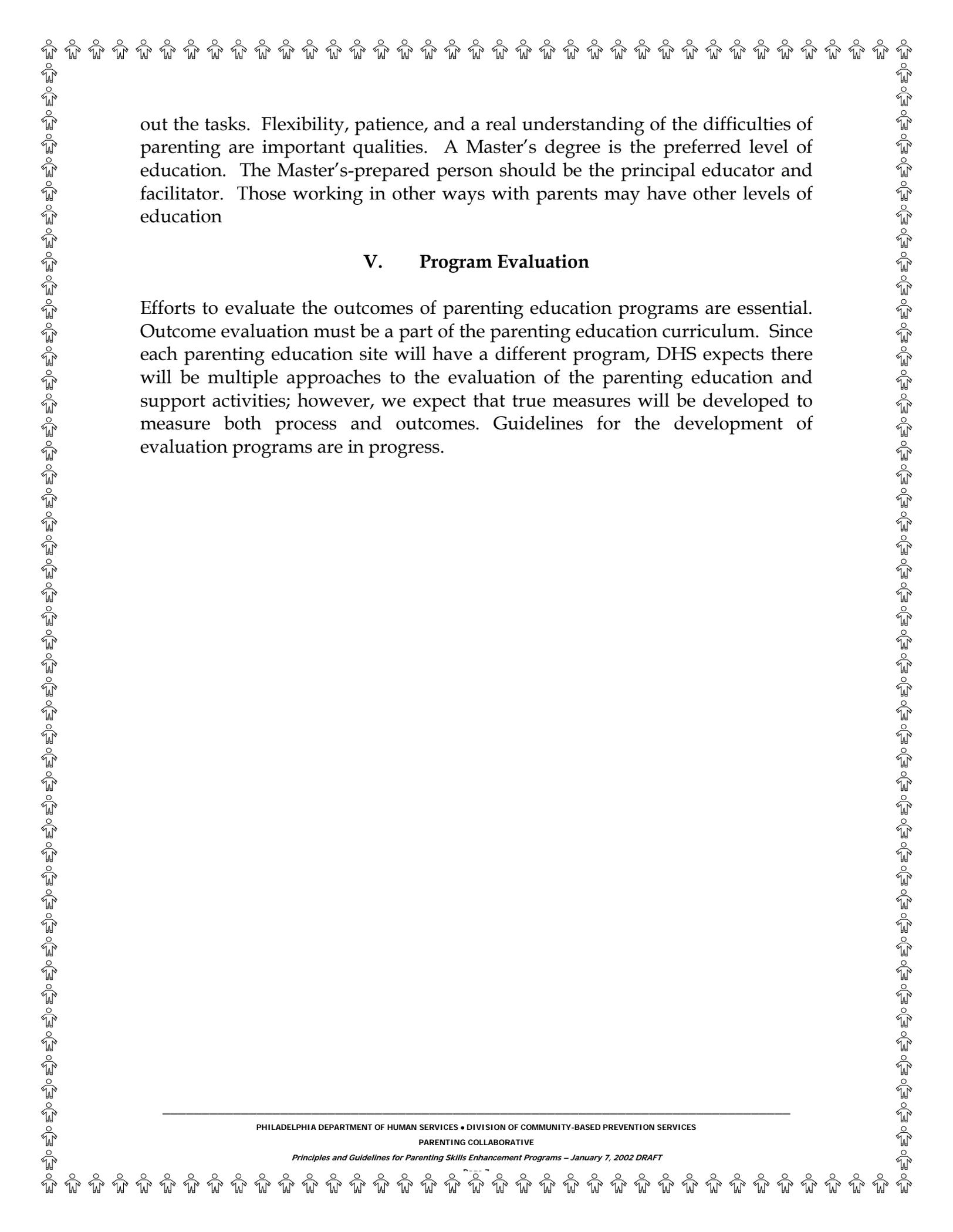
## III. Program Linkages

All parenting agencies must develop linkages with other providers to insure that parents in need of special services for their children are able to access them. These include, but are not limited to:

- Mental health services,
- Advocacy and support groups,
- Health services,
- Substance and abuse services,
- Sexual victim services,
- Housing and financial assistance,
- Practical support services (food, clothing, etc.)

## IV. Program Staffing

Parent educators should be individuals with a background in early child development or special training in specific methodologies and curricula to carry



out the tasks. Flexibility, patience, and a real understanding of the difficulties of parenting are important qualities. A Master's degree is the preferred level of education. The Master's-prepared person should be the principal educator and facilitator. Those working in other ways with parents may have other levels of education

## V. Program Evaluation

Efforts to evaluate the outcomes of parenting education programs are essential. Outcome evaluation must be a part of the parenting education curriculum. Since each parenting education site will have a different program, DHS expects there will be multiple approaches to the evaluation of the parenting education and support activities; however, we expect that true measures will be developed to measure both process and outcomes. Guidelines for the development of evaluation programs are in progress.