



A Graphics Experience: Evaluating Human Relationships That Harm

Extension Educator: Valerie Martinez-Luebke, Crawford County

PROGRAM

This program, designed as part of a series to help young women who have been convicted of a crime, offered an alternative to prison. Over a six-week period, the delivery methods used in this program included group discussions, role playing, exercises, and mini lectures.

PROGRAM OBJECTIVES

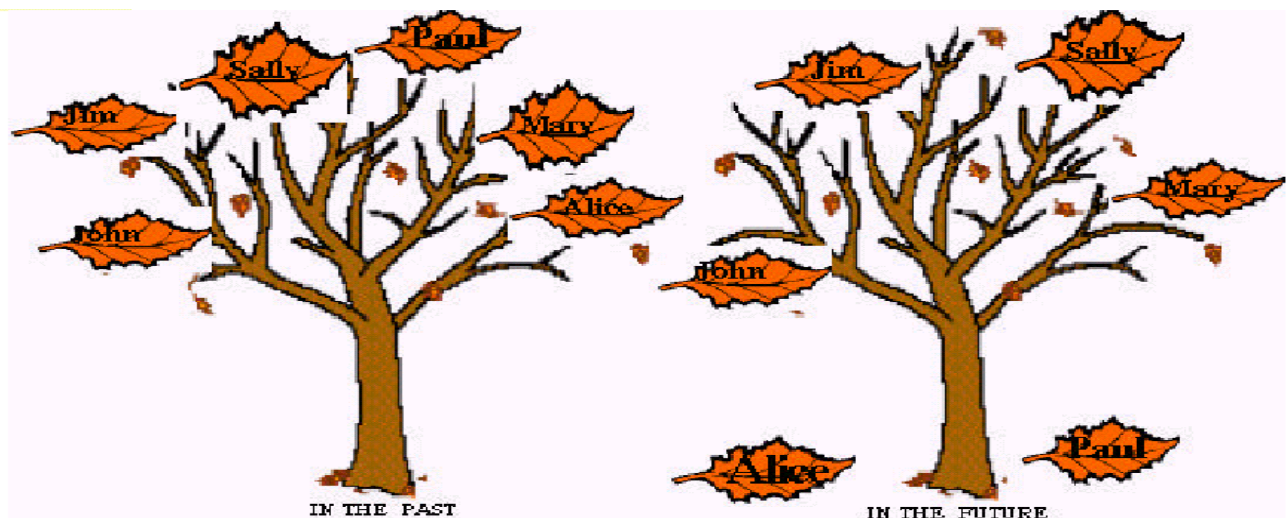
Participants will be able to identify harmful relationships that did not nourish good behavior in the past and decide to sever those relationships in the future.

EVALUATION STRATEGY

The evaluation presented an enormous challenge. As demonstrated in the program objective, information that was extremely sensitive and personal was needed from the young women to demonstrate success in the program. The county educator designed an *experiential evaluation*, one that is interwoven into a program in such a way that the evaluation becomes part of the learning experience. The county educator created a hands-on exercise that caused the participant to think reflectively and in an applied way about the principles being taught in the class. But the hands-on experience also elicited unobtrusive, before-after data without the participant feeling that the experience was an evaluation, test, or survey.

DATA COLLECTION METHOD: Experiential Evaluation

The county educator gave the participants a large graphic design (a tree) on which the participants were to paste smaller designs (leaves) on which they had written the names of people most influential in their lives as they entered the program. (See illustration). At the end of the six-week program, the county educator gave the participants another copy of the large graphic design (tree) with a new set of smaller designs (leaves).



The county educator told the participants to:

- write the names of the same people on the smaller design (leaves)
- put the names (leaves) signifying the relationships that they wanted to keep on the tree; but
- place the names (leaves) signifying the relationships that did not nourish them, and planned to sever as a result of the discussions in the program, at the base of the tree. The instructor could see at a glance if there was a difference between the beginning of the program and at the end. The instructor could count the number of relationships the participant planned to sever by the leaves at the bottom of the tree.

Benefits: This evaluation had many benefits. It was:

- INEXPENSIVE
- UNOBTRUSIVE
- EDUCATIONAL
- HANDS-ON
- WITHOUT RIGHT OR WRONG ANSWERS
- ABOUT NEGATIVE BEHAVIOR
- ABOUT A SENSITIVE TOPIC
- ABOUT A BEHAVIOR THAT IS NOT AS CONCRETE AS OTHERS AND THEREFORE DIFFICULT TO MEASURE
- COMPLEMENTARY TO THE MAIN PROGRAM IDEA: SOME RELATIONSHIPS NOURISH; OTHERS DO NOT

Additionally, the evaluation avoided use of an interview or survey, methods with personal questions that could have been threatening and difficult to answer. This evaluation was a learning experience focused on summing up the conclusions of what the participants had learned in the program about identifying relationships that did not nourish and severing those relationships considered harmful to their future.

APPLICATION OF THE EVALUATION TO OTHER PROGRAMS

FOR
NEGATIVE
BEHAVIOR

This particular evaluation focused on negative patterns or behavior in the participant's life. The graphic might also be a shopping basket *in which* participants could place items purchased in the past month that contributed to high caloric value or high cost of food. At the end of the program, the participants could place items discussed in the class they plan to cut down on, or eliminate, *outside* the shopping basket.

FOR
POSITIVE
BEHAVIOR

This type of evaluation could also focus on positive patterns or behavior in the participant's life. In a money management program for instance, the graphic might be a file in which participants could place items they now save regularly, such as checks. At the end of the program, the participants could place items in the file that they *plan to add* to the file within the next six weeks such as receipts from purchases, a will, or payroll stubs— whatever is being recommended in the program.

FOR
POSITIVE
BEHAVIOR

In a leadership program, the graphic might be a committee meeting table around which participants could place items in the beginning of the program that represented various task and maintenance roles that committee members perform regularly at meetings. At the end of the program, the participants could place items around the table that they *plan to add* to their set of roles at the next committee meeting such as "information seeker" (task role) or "encourager" (maintenance role).

USE OF THE DATA

In designing this evaluation, the county educator provided herself with hard data about extremely sensitive behavior and she achieved this by integrating evaluation as part of the learning experience. The data lead to three principal uses:

- The county educator used the data to measure accomplishments. Each participant was able to identify several relationships that she should sever.
- The county educator used the data to improve the program. The graphics turned out to be a more sophisticated evaluation instrument than expected. Some of the participants were only able to put the leaves *half way down* the tree, *not all the way on the ground* suggesting how engaged the participants were in the graphic. Instead of using either of the 2 options provided, in the tree or on the ground, participants created a third option, falling from the tree, depicting a relationship that was more difficult to sever. This evidence of partial accomplishment signified to the county educator that more work would be needed with some participants the next time she taught the class.
- The county educator also used data with stakeholders: her advisory committee, the court, and county commissioners.

For further information about the evaluation, please contact Nancy Ellen Kiernan (nekiernan@psu.edu). This Web site is copyrighted by the Pennsylvania State University. The information may be used for educational purposes but not sold for profit.