



You don't want to lose your child

Parental support Somali parents

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In collaboration with

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PHAROS

Colofon

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And a woman who held a babe against her bosom said, "Speak to us of Children."

And he said:

Your children are not your children.

They are the sons and daughters of Life's longing for itself.

They come through you but not from you,

And though they are with you, yet they belong not to you.

You may give them your love but not your thoughts.

For they have their own thoughts.

You may house their bodies but not their souls,

For their souls dwell in the house of tomorrow, which you cannot visit, not even in your dreams.

You may strive to be like them, but seek not to make them like you.

For life goes not backward nor tarries with yesterday.

You are the bows from which your children as living arrows are sent forth.

The archer sees the mark upon the path of the infinite, and He bends you with His might that His arrows may go swift and far.

Let your bending in the archer's hand be for gladness;

For even as he loves the arrow that flies, so He loves also the bow that is stable.

Kahlil Gibran, *The Prophet* ¹

<http://allpoetry.com>

¹ Quote from *'The Prophet'*, written by the Lebanon born poet Kahlil Gibran. This book combines Western and Eastern mysticism and has been translated in more than forty languages.

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1. Introduction

There are just over 30,000 Somalis living in The Netherlands. They belong to the large group of refugees who have left their country since the start of the civil war in the eighties of the last century. It is a young group with lots of children. Practice shows that Somali parents entering the country want information on parenting and schooling in The Netherlands. Previous research under scribes the need for parental and family support for this group. Not in the least because the Somalis who arrive in The Netherlands come from a country that is largely destroyed and damaged by war violence. Violence in which family members were killed, families separated from each other and parents could not always support their children sufficiently. The large gap between parental values and parenting practice in the areas of origin and in The Netherlands reinforces the need for accessible and demand-oriented support. Care and social workers in the COA asylum seekers centres endorse the need for this, but existing parenting courses are not appropriate. Both content and approach do not appeal to the world of parents who recently arrived in The Netherlands. They don't know about the parenting methods and feel uncomfortable using them. They do want advice based on their own questions and experiences. As soon as they arrive in The Netherlands, they experience the feeling of being different and they do not want their children to become estranged to them. They also fear that the Dutch authorities may take their children away from them. Therefore, the title "You don't want to lose your child" is chosen.

Over the years, local social work organizations and prevention departments of mental health institutions have been supporting parents in raising their children in asylum seeker centres on a very limited scale by offering information and courses. These courses have not been described properly and therefore cannot be used in other centres. With the description of this ready to use course it will be easier for more organisations to offer these courses in asylum seekers centres. This method can also be used for Somalis having a residence permit living in municipalities spread over the country. It can be used to complement existing methods for parental support. Another aim of this publication, especially the first part, is to emphasise the need for parental support and put this on the agenda.

This description is based on three courses conducted in the asylum seekers centre in Nijmegen; two courses for mothers and one for fathers. Two collaborating social work organisations, Het Inter-Lokaal (social and legal services) and NIM (institution for social work in Nijmegen), carry out these courses. The two trainers, well embedded in local social work and experienced in parental support, succeed to connect to this difficult group. The result is a demand-driven and interactive approach, which is sometimes more like group social work than structured parenting courses used in The Netherlands such as "Opvoeden en Zo". Pharos has described this course partly based on the evaluations of two groups of participants. In addition elements of existing parenting courses, research material, practical knowledge and experiences have been used by Pharos.

The ethnic background of the trainers: Somali and Moroccan have proved to be vital for success. Not in the least because the parents do not naturally participate in this course, despite the questions they have, and they should be actively recruited. By the (partially) shared ethnic and linguistic backgrounds, participants expect acknowledgement, recognition and trust. The trainers work intensively with COA (the Central Agency for the Reception of Asylum Seekers) and they are positive about this approach. In the asylum seekers centre,

the COA staff acknowledges the usefulness of this approach. Also from a national policy perspective, the COA is particularly pleased about this local approach.

The first part of this publication provides useful background information on Somalis for trainers. The focus will be on Somalis who have fled from their country and on specific parental obstacles. However, the information from this first part can equally be used to motivate policy makers and managers to put such a program on the agenda and make it possible. The second part is the actual manual for the course.

‘Compared to other immigrant groups in The Netherlands, the Somalis are from a completely different world. That is not very surprising. They are the first generation and have been through so much. Especially when they live in the asylum seekers centre, there still are many uncertainties. In many cases they are broken families. Family members live in refugee camps in Somalia or they are scattered all over the world. They need support just as many Turkish and Moroccan immigrant parents. They have questions about the difference between how they were raised and how they should educate their children in The Netherlands. Cooperation with the school, contact with institutions of child protection and youth care; these are issues they have in common with other immigrant groups. But since there are so many other existential uncertainties, their questions on parenting are more acute. The thread to normal life for these groups is very thin. There is so much despair. You cannot compare these families with the second generation of immigrant families in The Netherlands. Even though it is difficult to organise, parenting support is no luxury. This should just be a part of the regular introduction program. It should be an integral part of the orientation course COA organises. It really needs to be done in Somali, which not everyone is capable of doing. Using the help of key figures is very important. Fortunately, you meet many strong women who can be an example to others.’ (Quote trainer)

Note on the translation:

The translation was made in June 2012. The original text has been retained as much as possible. The demographic data are updated. Since January 2011 the book has been downloaded over 2000 times. Pharos does not list exactly who the users are. What is clear is that it is also used to support Somalis who have been in The Netherlands for a longer period of time. It is used as background information for social workers and Somali organisations. Besides group meetings it is also useful for individual guidance by, for example, youth health care professionals.

Part I Background information Somalis

1 The social position of Somalis

In order to give course to Somali asylum seekers it is useful to have some background knowledge. The information in this chapter is intended not only for social workers but also for policy makers, because it shows how necessary it is to offer support. There is also herein, demographic data and information about cultural and religious background. This is followed by facts about integration, not only in The Netherlands but in other Western countries as well. Educational aspirations and actual educational performances are also discussed, since it is an important subject in the course. The chapter concludes by proposing that all these facts point to the importance of supporting Somalis in a proactive manner when it comes to the education of their children, whilst making sure to fit in any questions and ideas they themselves have.

Somalis: numbers and family composition

According to the population register there are 31,237 Somalis living in The Netherlands². About a third of them are under 21 years old. Almost a quarter of the group is under 10 years old. Of the 2200 Somalis who stay in the asylum seekers centres in 2012³, only some of them are registered in the population register. There are also an estimated several thousand Somalis in The Netherlands without legal residency. Therefore, in reality the Somali population is larger than the figures show. A few years ago, the number of Somalis migrating from The Netherlands to Great Britain was larger than the inflow. Since 2007 this is no longer the case⁴. In 2011, 11,000 Somalis asked for asylum in The Netherlands. Most children grow up in a one-parent family, because of the big number of divorces in both Somalia and The Netherlands and the large number of families who have fallen apart due to political violence and war violence.

Islam and clan background

Most Somalis are Sunni Muslims, although there are a few exceptions. Traditionally, the Islam of the Somalis is not orthodox in nature. As nomads they are less attached to rigid religious rules and the authority of religious leaders⁵. However, because of recent political and religious changes in Somalia, this has changed dramatically. The militant Islamic movement Al-Shahaab is gaining more influence in some areas of Somalia. Also, Somali society is divided into clans. The clan structure is very important. It was generally assumed that clan background plays an important role in The Netherlands as well. However, study shows that this is not the case for young Somalis, who are the majority in The Netherlands. They know their background or clan and to some extent it is a part of their identity, but they do not judge other Somalis by their clan background⁶.

² *Statistics Netherlands* statline, 27-7-2010

³ www.coa.nl

⁴ Klaver, J., Poel, P. & Stouten J. (2010). Somaliërs in Nederland; een verkenning van hun maatschappelijke positie en aanknopingspunten voor beleid. Regioplan, in opdracht van het ministerie van VROM. Amsterdam: Regioplan.

⁵ Moors J.A., Reek Vermeulen, E. van den & Siesling, M. (2009). Voedingsbodem voor radicalisering bij kleine etnische groepen in Nederland, een verkennend onderzoek in de Somalische Pakistaanse, Koerdische en Molukse gemeenschappen. IVA: Tilburg.

⁶ Moors, J.A., Reek-Vermeulen, E. van den & Siesling, M. (2009). Voedingsbodem voor radicalisering bij kleine etnische groepen in Nederland, een verkennend onderzoek in de Somalische Pakistaanse, Koerdische en Molukse gemeenschappen. Tilburg: IVA.

'I never talk about the background of the Somali clan. Whether you're from the north or the south, I do not give a name to those backgrounds. Of course I hear things, I recognise an accent, but I think it's not important.' (quote trainer)

Somalis often do not feel at home in The Netherlands

Many Somalis in The Netherlands do not feel at home. They find it hard to settle ⁷. This means, among other things, that they are not aware of important laws and regulations and the use of Dutch facilities, Dutch habits and manners. The first group of Somali refugees who came to The Netherlands in the late eighties, early nineties were better educated compared to the average Somali population, but nevertheless they still had great difficulty in finding paid employment. Somalis who came to The Netherlands after that have for a longer period had to deal with lawlessness, growing social chaos, war and fundamentalism in their home country^{8 9}. They had little opportunities to go to school. Many parents and children are illiterate, which compromises their opportunities for obtaining an education. This has partly caused their low social economic status. They are at the bottom of the income scale. Unemployment is high, young Somalis are often involved in crime and show problematic behaviour. They are overrepresented in crime figures ¹⁰. In the various studies quoted here researchers have linked this to mental illness and psychological trauma caused by war violence and other traumatic events. However, in research reports this is not explained properly. Somalis themselves do not acknowledge that association. What in Western society we would call avoidance and denial is a way for Somalis to deal with the experienced war violence ¹¹.

Somalis find it hard to settle in the North America and Western Europe

Not only in The Netherlands, but in many other European countries and in the United States, Somalis find it difficult to settle. There are 60.000 Somalis living in the North American state of Minnesota and the integration process there is very difficult ¹². Somali children are performing badly in school and have developmental disadvantages. Young Somalis exhibit many behavioural problems and aggression. Some young Somalis from Minnesota have returned to Somalia and joined Islamic terrorist movements ¹³. In the United Kingdom reside approximately 100,000 to 250,000 Somalis ¹⁴. Their situation is far from promising ¹⁵. Unemployment is high, Somali children perform worse in school than

⁷ Reek, van den, E.W.A. (2001). Somaliërs en integratie, een profielschets. Wetenschapswinkel, Katholieke Universiteit Brabant.

⁸ Klaver, J. & Welle, I. van der (2009). Vluchtelingenwerk Integratiebarometer 2009. Een onderzoek naar de integratie van vluchtelingen in Nederland. Regioplan, in opdracht van Vluchtelingenwerk Nederland. Amsterdam: Regioplan.

⁹ Klaver, J., Poel, P. & Stouten J. (2010). Somaliërs in Nederland; een verkenning van hun maatschappelijke positie en aanknopingspunten voor beleid. Regioplan, in opdracht van het ministerie van VROM. Amsterdam: Regioplan.

^{10 10} Kromhout, M. & San, M. van (2003). Schimmige werelden, nieuwe etnische groepen en jeugdcriminaliteit. Den Haag: Ministerie van Justitie Boom.

¹¹ Mehrnaz, A., Halane, A. & Gasle, S. (2009). Geef me raad. Deskundigheidsbevordering ggz-professionals geestelijke gezondheid Somaliërs. Utrecht: Pharos.

¹² Degni, F., Pontinen, S. & Molsas, M. (2006). Somali Parents' Experiences of Bringing up Children in Finland: Exploring Social-Cultural Change within Migrant Households [52 paragraphs]. *Forum: Qualitative Sozialforschung / Forum: Qualitative Social Research*, volume 7nr 3.

¹³ January 18, 2009. Bob Drogin Los Angeles Times <http://articles.latimes.com/2009/jan/18/nation/na-missing18/2>.

¹⁴ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Somalis_in_the_United_Kingdom

¹⁵ Rutter, J. (2006). Refugee Children in the UK. Maidenhead, England: Open University Press.

children from other refugee communities, there are many broken families, school dropouts are high and violence in schools frequent. Young people seek refuge in radical Muslim movements due to stigmatisation and exclusion elsewhere. This stigmatisation increased after the terrorist attack on the London underground in 2005 where Somalis were involved. Recently, it seems that the tides are changing. Young people and woman are increasingly active in community events and Somalis are more often chosen as mayor or councillor¹⁶. Such role models have a positive impact on other Somalis. For the ones who have suffered from the war and exile circumstances, these developments provide hope for a better future. Especially for young people, these positive role models are very important.

Educational position of Somali children in The Netherlands

There is nothing refugee parents in a new country want more for their children than good opportunities and the chance to seize those opportunities. Not in the least because they believe that they no longer have those opportunities themselves. But for Somali children it is hard to find and seize opportunities. Many children did not go to school much in Somalia due to the war. They perform poorly in Dutch schools, also in comparison with other immigrant and refugee groups. A relatively large group of children end up in special education¹⁷. The number of boys who do not show up at school and school dropouts in secondary education and secondary vocational education is very high¹⁸. These bad performances and adjustment problems should not come as a surprise, since these children start with a knowledge and development arrears. Besides there are other factors that hinder their school career. Somali parents too are poorly educated, speak limited Dutch and have little knowledge of the Dutch educational system and what is expected of them. The idea that these parents have of a school and the expectations they have of the role of the teacher do not match with the Dutch approach. This is partly why communication between parents and the school is difficult. Also, Dutch teachers are not always equipped to deal with these immigrant parents or they are reluctant to do so because of the extra time it takes¹⁹. Practice shows that teachers draw conclusions too quickly, such as assuming psychological problems are due to traumatic experiences. This can lead to teachers having low expectations and that the causes of the learning disadvantages not being adequately investigated. Many parents have unrealistic expectations about the school career of their children, given their own developmental and educational disadvantages. They do not to give their children the educational support they need. This can cause disappointment in parents. Children can get behind in this situation. A first step to achieve an adequate partnership with the school is to educate parents about the Dutch education system so they feel somewhat capable to communicate and cooperate with the schools of their children. Schools should invest in contact with parents, institutions and private Somali organisations.

¹⁶ Footnote 11

¹⁷ Bouwmeester M., Dekovic, M. & Groenendaal, H. (1998). *Opvoeden in Somalische vluchtelinggezinnen in Nederland*. Assen: Van Gorcum & Comp.

¹⁸ Moors, J.A., Reek-Vermeulen, E. van den & Siesling, M. (2009). *Voedingsbodem voor radicalisering bij kleine etnische groepen in Nederland, een verkennend onderzoek in de Somalische Pakistaanse, Koerdische en Molukse gemeenschappen*. Tilburg: IVA.

¹⁹ Baan, J., Tuk, B. (2008) *Thuis in burgerschap – Praktijkboek en DVD; Sociale integratie en actief burgerschap in het onderwijs*. Utrecht: Pharos.

'An example of a subject that regularly comes up during the course is the contradiction between the teachers expectation of children at school and the idea students and parents have on what is 'good' behavior. Sometimes teachers feel that immigrant students are not assertive enough. They do what their teachers and other students tell them without asking too many questions. They look down when a teacher speaks to them, which teachers perceive as 'submissive' behavior. Immigrant parents are often very surprised about this. What they see as correct; showing respect, not arguing with the teacher and being helpful to other children, is apparently something that people in The Netherlands disapprove of?' (Source: trainer)

Intensive support and cooperation is necessary

The experience of private Somali organisations and professionals shows that Somalis who have lived in The Netherlands for a long time still find it hard to find the institutions they need. According to the report *Somalis in The Netherlands*²⁰ it is essential that Somalis are well-informed and supported, starting as soon as they arrive in The Netherlands and onwards. The distance to the Dutch society and the barriers within the group are so great that the support provided in this first period and the help during the integration is insufficient for Somalis to make a connection to the Dutch society. According to this report, they need comprehensive information in their own language, about subjects as the education of children in The Netherlands, the Dutch school system and the labor market. It also shows that attention must be given to finding what helps Somalis cope with the war violence they have seen or endured. According to the researchers, an important condition for all these activities is to involve and work together with the target group. Then, people who speak the language and are familiar with the Somali culture can offer support. It does not seem necessary to develop entirely new interventions, but existing instruments should be re-arranged to reach out to and help this group.

Knowledge, not indoctrination

Parents who live in asylum seekers centres without knowing if they will be allowed to stay in The Netherlands, do not have a natural orientation to integrating in the Dutch society. Earlier experiences in the asylum seekers centre 's-Gravendeel show that parenting support in this stage improves the welfare of children and parents²¹. When asked, parents want to know how Dutch families raise their children, how the Dutch educational system works, what the attitudes are toward child care and how they can prevent or reduce children having problems. Also, they want to know about institutions that can possibly 'interfere' with their children's lives. Parenting is a private matter, so institutions and governments who want to provide support in that area should respect their capabilities of parenting. Somali parents want to know about the new society they live in, but like many other immigrant groups in Western countries they fear indoctrination. They are afraid of these new educational values and assume that they will become alienated from their children. In the next chapter, this issue is extensively discussed.

²⁰ Klaver, J., Poel, P. & Stouten J. (2010). Somaliers in Nederland; een verkenning van hun maatschappelijke positie en aanknopingspunten voor beleid. Regioplan, in opdracht van het ministerie van VROM. Amsterdam: Regioplan.

²¹ Swart-Parengkuan, Nina. (2008, juni). Preventieprogramma voor psychosociale problematiek bij jeugdigen en hun ouders/verzorgers verblijvend in asielzoekerscentra. 's-Gravendeel: MOA.

2. Education in The Netherlands

*'In The Netherlands, parents obey their children and the child is boss, while in Somalia the parents are in charge.'*²²

This chapter describes how the educational values of non-Western immigrants in The Netherlands are often a reflection of their own traditional upbringing. It highlights the educational goals of Somalis in order of importance and the need for parenting support to supplement this. Also, this chapter is about the ambivalence of Somali parents toward the 'Dutch' educational values. Additionally, it addresses briefly some specific aspects like the lack of distinction between baby, toddler, and the preschool phase; the role of religion as a guideline; gender attitudes; the role of fathers; conceptions of authority and respect and the fact that there are many single-parent families.

The influence of war, poverty and lawlessness is discussed, along with the reason that there are many incomplete families and psychologically damaged parents and children. Illiteracy and moral 'degeneration' are some of the consequences. It argues that methods which inform parents about education and the education of their children have a healing effect. After all, it gives them the tools they need to take up their parental task. Life in an asylum seekers centre is discussed as a source of stress to parents and the influence this has on the way they raise their children. Experiences with (war) violence and a number of social and psychological factors play a role in the fact that Somali children are vulnerable to child abuse, although there is no hard evidence for this. In conclusion, it draws attention to female circumcision. This specific form of child abuse often occurs in Somalia.

Parental values and practices are often subconscious

Parents, whether it is conscious or subconscious, make decisions regarding how they raise their children. Immigrant parents who have recently come to The Netherlands, will initially draw on the culture and the prevailing parenting style of their motherland²³. Parents in traditional, non-Western cultures, who have had little education, are not accustomed to reflect on their values and parenting style. They reproduce the parenting of their own parents and other relatives. Often they are used to strictly defined roles for children and parents. When parents have a low social economic status, they are so preoccupied with the struggle for existence, that raising their children merely means feeding them and caring for them. They usually do this in an authoritarian parenting style. Many parents come from countries where the collective of 'nuclear family', extended family, clan and ethnic group is important because it provides protection. In The Netherlands and many other Western countries, especially in the middle and upper class, the emphasis lies on individual development. Although the often-used distinction between individually and collectively oriented societies is quite comprehensive, denying the large individual differences between people it helps to create an insight in the function of specific parental values like respect, obedience and good behaviour. In countries without collective amenities such as insurance, benefits and health care institutions these are functional values which promote cohesion and encourage mutual support and care.

²² Nieuwhof, A. (2004). Somalische ouders centraal: de aanpak in het project Ondersteuning Somalische gezinnen. Gouda : JSO expertisecentrum - 34 p.

²³ Pharos Dossier preventieve opvoedingsondersteuning.

http://www.pharos.nl/uploads/_site_1/Pdf/Jeugd/Kd-Opvoeding_pdf.pdf

Parental values of Somali parents

The following figure shows the differences between what parents in Somalia think is important and what is important to many native Dutch families ²⁴. Parental values do not arise in a vacuum. When parents find performing well at school very important this is also a response to the new living situation, as we have learned from other refugees. Because parents themselves fear to be sidelined in the West they have high expectations of the Western education as a means to emancipate their children in the new society. But they are ambivalent about what the new society offers. In an environment where “Western parenting” is common, Somali parents sometimes fall back on traditional parental values to keep their children from behaviour they see as a sign of moral decay. It is important to know about the values and perceptions of these parents. On the one hand it helps to engage in a dialogue, but it also helps explain why parents show specific parenting behaviour. Clinging to old values can be a result of insecurity, a fear of ‘losing’ their children and a lack of knowledge about and confidence in alternative values and education tools.

Education goals in order of importance	
<i>Native Dutch parents</i>	<i>Somali parents</i>
Sense of responsibility	Good grades, high education
Caring for others	Obedience
Making independent judgements	To be civilised, polite, show good behaviour
Good manners	Respect
Tolerance	Taking care of oneself
Good results in school	Intelligence
Being helpful	Marriage
Respect the elderly	Kindness
Wanting to know why things happen as they do	Preserve culture and language
Diligence and being ambitious	Helpful and caring to parents
Obey parents	Caring for others
Intelligence	Good relationships with others
	Making independent decisions

This figure shows the order of goals parents have. These goals are often visible in the daily parenting of their children. Somali parents are often aware that their ideas on parenting are different from those of the Dutch. Therefore they sometimes struggle to integrate these two different parenting values: trusted values they learned in Somalia and the new ‘Dutch’ values. They feel insecure about the way other children in The Netherlands are being educated and they do not know if they should be very controlling or whether they should be lenient²⁵ towards their own children.

²⁴ The following paragraphs and the diagram are largely taken from: Bouwmeester M., Dekovic, M. & Groenendaal, H. (1998). *Opvoeden in Somalische vluchtelingengezinnen in Nederland*. Assen: Van Gorcum & Comp.

²⁵ Pels, T. & Gruijter, M. de (red.) (2005). *Vluchtelingengezinnen: opvoeding en integratie*. Opvoeding en ondersteuning in gezinnen uit Iran, Irak, Somalië en Afghanistan in Nederland. Assen: Van Gorcum.

Sokal, D. (2001). *Psychische problemen van asielzoekerskinderen in de leeftijd van 4 tot en met 12 jaar*. Scriptie sociale geneeskunde. Utrecht: NSPH.

They are aware that they need to adapt their parenting in order to offer their children a good future in The Netherlands. On the other hand, they set themselves against the Dutch style of parenting.

In this the Somalis are not unique. Other immigrant parents, regardless of their education, background or generation, are struggling with, for example, the great assertiveness of Dutch children. To these parents, it seems Dutch children lack respect for adults and they think their sexual morality is too free²⁶. Somalis in Finland name the exact same clashes in parenting values²⁷. They note that their Islamic beliefs do not match with the Finnish culture and therefore find that it alienates them from their children. They believe that the Finnish society is to blame.

'A lot of written information about parenting in brochures or booklets does not reach the Somalis. Not only because the Somalis in The Netherlands are often illiterate, but mostly because they are much more accustomed to an oral tradition. They learn from each other through story telling. Parenting support in Nijmegen draws on this. Often the conversation trainers have with fathers and mothers during the course are continued in the corridors and rooms of the residential buildings. That is why sometimes suddenly there are new women present at a new course session. It is partly a community approach. Trainers sometimes deliberately focus on the more educated women and/ or strong women, because they can have a strong influence within their community.'

Some specific features of parental values in Somali families

- *Stages in child development and child rearing are little known*

Just as many Moroccan parents, Somali parents make little distinction between different stages of child development and the associated educational approach. For example, they don't make a distinction between babies, toddlers and pre-school children. They do distinguish the development in puberty and have clear expectations about how their children should behave at this stage. What since the last century has become a custom in many Dutch families; negotiating with adolescents on the basis of a certain equivalency, is disapproved of by many Somali parents.

'The Somali language has no word for toddlers and kids. Somali parents spoil their babies and toddlers, like many Moroccan parents, and often lack to set limits. In the course we explain much about how it helps to take even the youngest children seriously and talk with them.' (quote trainers)

²⁶ Pels, T., Distelbrink, M. en Postma, L. (2009). 'Opvoeding in de migratiecontext. Review van onderzoek naar de opvoeding in gezinnen van nieuwe Nederlanders'. Utrecht: Verwey-Jonker Instituut.

²⁷ Degni, Filio, Pöntinen, Seppo & Mulki, Mölsä (2006). Somali Parents' Experiences of Bringing up Children in Finland: Exploring Social-Cultural Change within Migrant Households. *Forum Qualitative Sozialforschung / Forum: Qualitative Social Research*, 7(3), Art. 8, <http://nbn-resolving.de/urn:nbn:de:0114-fqs060388>.

- *Religion as a guideline in child rearing*

For many people Bible and Koran rules ensure the daily pedagogy. Somalis formulate their goals often in religious education regulations, as is common for many religious people. Prayer, fasting, Koran lessons and living life following the directions of the Koran is an important part of their life. Parents think their children become better people if they follow these rules. Especially during adolescence, this means that they expect very different behaviour than what is 'normal' to the native young people. No alcohol, no free mixing between girls and boys, no sex before marriage.

'A child is a gift from God. This obliges us to take good care of it.' (quote participant)

- *Rules, authority and discipline*

Somali parents consider obedience an important educational goal (see diagram). To have respect for other adults, obedience and polite behaviour is very important to them. Rules are necessary. Although they find explanation about this useful, they quickly decide to use punishment. They will rather place themselves 'above' the child than stand next to the child, and they enforce obedience. It is common in Somalia to get angry and give a child a beating. There is no taboo on corporal punishment.

'Parents don't know what is expected of them. If they are not allowed to beat their children, they expect them to become as 'rude' as Dutch children. At the same time, they do want us to tell them what it is really like in The Netherlands. Though even in the course they are usually late, both mothers and fathers are very eager to learn.' (quote trainer)

- *Gender*

Within the traditional child rearing culture of many non-Western immigrants there is a strong distinction between the approach of boys and girls and the gender roles assigned to them²⁸. Girls are expected to perform well in school, but at the same time they are being prepared for a future role as a wife and mother by letting them take care of many household tasks. This sometimes causes friction. Boys usually receive a lot of freedom, but when their father is absent, they sometimes have to take over the responsibility for the entire family. When boys do badly in school it is more often condoned than when girls do not perform well.

- *Fathers*

Somali men in The Netherlands often struggle with their role as a parent. Although the daily parenting of children in Somalia is foremost a 'woman thing', fathers still play a very important part. They represent the family authority. This role is dictated by tradition, but also by their position as breadwinner. Due to high unemployment rates, many men do not have this position anymore. Because of this, fathers are losing their authority. Adding to this is that the traditional Somali way of making that authority known, by submission and beating, is strongly condemned in The Netherlands. This can make Somali fathers feel empty handed. It takes a lot of adjustment for them to take up a more active role in the education of their children and the household. Some fathers are able to take this step, but many can not. The feeling of failure as a breadwinner impedes changes towards 'modern' parenting.

²⁸ Kosec H. (2005). Projectplan Genderbewust opvoeden in Rotterdam. Skala: Rotterdam

It is therefore important to offer parenting support to fathers as well as mothers. If it is not possible to arrange this, it partly can be achieved indirectly by discussing the role of the father with women who take part in course.

*'The mother is the foundation of raising children; she teaches them everything and she gives them everything, like a healthy nutrition, good care, love, she does everything for them, but the father has a different role. He is responsible for the family's finances, he regularly checks the children's homework, he has a good contact with the teachers and solves problems outside of the family home.'*²⁹

- *Single mothers*

Somali mothers have trouble raising their boys, because they often raise their children alone and do not receive support from male family members. The boys know no different than that they are allowed to be independent. Mothers are not used to show boys their authority. In the course there is a lot of attention to the way mothers can implement this.³⁰

The influence of war, poverty and lawlessness

Cultural influences determine child rearing, but extreme living conditions can also have a strong influence. When people live in poor circumstances for a long time, when they have to deal with war violence and other violence and when they are driven away from their homes, it has a great impact on the child and the family.

- Families and extended families are often incomplete, so basic care and support is missing. Not only the 'nuclear' family is incomplete, but also the extended family can no longer offer any support.
- When a child or an adult goes through (the threat of) war violence, it can have many direct and indirect consequences. The loss of loved ones and other shocking experiences can lead to psychological damage, for example psychological traumas. This can have temporary, long-term and delayed effects. Depression is a common complaint. Psychological damage to parents can cause them to neglect or even abuse their children. Raising children who are damaged, asks a lot of the pedagogical approach of parents. When parents are not capable to do this, because they do not recognise the problems of their child, a family may experience cumulative stress.

Anarchy, political and religious terror and social disorder threaten the development of children in many ways, with possible consequences such as illiteracy and moral dehumanisation.

'I notice that young Somalis who have recently come to The Netherlands no longer have the traditional, respectful way of communicating with the elderly and it makes me very worried.'
(quote of key person from private Somali organisation)

- When parents are not able to protect their children, it can damage their self-confidence and development.

²⁹ Kosec H. (2005). Projectplan Genderbewust opvoeden in Rotterdam. Skala: Rotterdam

³⁰ Remarks from the trainers

'The group of Somalis is uprooted and they have difficulty adapting to the rules. Their day and night rhythm is disturbed, there is too much noise, children easily are stealing others properties and they are often playing outside until late.' (quote COA worker)

Support in child rearing as the pillar of psychological recovery

Recent research reports on Somalis in The Netherlands often refer to the influence of war traumas^{31 32}. These traumas could be the cause of problems with child rearing. This raises the question if psychological treatment of these traumas for children and parents is needed. Professionals who work with Somalis and private Somali organisations say that many Somalis who come to The Netherlands have indeed experienced war violence. However, there has not been any research done on the extent, the impact and the perception of how war violence has been experienced. In reality, it is often difficult to find a correlation between living problems and experienced war violence. Other stress factors, like missing relatives, living in an asylum seekers centre, being a single parent and not being familiar with the culture, play a major role. In other words: we do not have a clear idea on the specific problems due to war violence. We learned from other refugees that they do not give the same meaning to traumatic events as Western aid workers do. This is partly why many refugees do not recognise themselves in the underlying theories of prevention and treatment of traumas. The denying mechanisms victims of violence show will grow stronger when victims give a different meaning to problems and look for different solutions³³. In The Netherlands experiences confirm that Somalis have a very different look on what psychological health is, which is far removed from that of the Dutch society and in particular health professionals³⁴. There are hardly any words in the Somali language to describe psychological problems and there is a great taboo on the expression of psychological distress. When it comes to severe disorders, the Somali think it is because of djinns, being possessed or the evil eye rather than mental illness. Somali parents hardly ever relate problems their children have to experienced war violence³⁵.

Research done in Sweden amongst refugee children (from the former Yugoslavia amongst others), emphasise that focusing on the traumas of these children is detrimental. The studies cited by the researchers indicate that post-traumatic symptoms of children from war zones reduce quickly, with or without treatment. Therefore, an approach in which social support and community play a central role seems to be an alternative. The researchers explicitly focus on methods that help to inform parents about their role in school education and parenting, so they have more tools to really take up their parental role.

³¹ Reek, E.W.A., van den (2001). Somaliërs en integratie, een profielschets. Wetenschapswinkel, Katholieke Universiteit Brabant.

³² Klaver, J., Poel, P. & Stouten J. (2010). Somaliers in Nederland; een verkenning van hun maatschappelijke positie en aanknopingspunten voor beleid. Regioplan, in opdracht van het ministerie van VROM. Amsterdam: Regioplan.

³³ Hjern A., Jeppsson O. (2004). Mental health care for refugee children in exile. I: Ingleby, D (red). Forced migration and mental health: Rethinking the care of refugees and displaced persons. New York: Kluwer.

³⁴ Mehrzad, A., Halane, A. & Gasle, S. (2009) Geef me raad. Deskundigheidsbevordering ggz-professionals geestelijke gezondheid Somaliërs . Utrecht: Pharos.

³⁵ Bouwmeester M., Dekovic, M. & Groenendaal, H. (1998). Opvoeden in Somalische vluchtelinggezinnen in Nederland. Assen: Van Gorcum & Comp.

This seems obvious, because parents who are in control of raising their children and see that they are doing well, will also begin to feel better themselves. And when parents show confidence, it helps the development of their children.

Specialised help is sometimes necessary

In some cases, specialised help is necessary. The psychological and developmental damage caused by war violence, but also neglect during the stay in refugee camps, can have such an impact that adequate support for children and parents becomes a necessity. This is the case when, for example, people cannot function properly on a daily bases. Specialised help is also needed for those children who are retarded, autistic or dyslexic. Referring people is often difficult because parents are unfamiliar with these types of facilities and may have a very negative idea of mental health institutions and specialised help. Initially, it is recommended to start with a pragmatic approach focused on strengthening the parenting skills. This approach will also have positive effects on the mental health of child and family. When parents feel comfortable with the support they are receiving, they will be more likely to accept a possible referral. This means that organisations and institutions need to work on winning their trust.

The influence of life as an asylum seeker

Applying for a residence permit takes a long time in The Netherlands and during that time refugee's reside in an asylum seekers centre. During this period, they have very limited opportunity to participate in society. There are orientation programs in the centres, residents can follow an introductory course in Dutch and can attend a computer course. They are also allowed to do some work at the centre for which they receive a small income. When the asylum seeker is granted a residence permit, they can start with an integration course and Dutch language lessons at the asylum seekers centre. Nevertheless, most asylum seekers feel like second class citizens. This has a lot to do with the setting of the asylum seekers centres. They are spread throughout the country. Sometimes old barracks or monasteries are used for this purpose. Prefabricated houses are most common. In urban areas centres are sparse. They are more often found in remote and inaccessible areas. Many asylum seekers talk about the centre as 'the camp'. An asylum seekers centre is strongly distinguished from an ordinary residential area. There is uniformed security staff, fences, staff carries walky-talky's and people are required to report to Immigration and Naturalisation Services (IND) supervisors at set times. People from very different backgrounds live close together. Asylum seekers centres are 'total institutions'³⁶. Residents are, just as people in hospitals, prisons or monasteries, at risk of becoming passive and feel they have lost their grip on life. The living spaces are small. There is no privacy. Parents and children often live together in one room. Sometimes several different nationalities live in one room. It is difficult to raise children under these circumstances. Despite the many activities the centre offers, many asylum seekers experience boredom. The Ministry of Justice and the COA want their stay to be no longer than one year, but there are many external factors that determine the length of stay. Examples include: the unpredictability of the intake period, availability of housing for asylum seekers who have received a residence permit, the availability of shelter locations and the duration of the procedure. In the past, a lot of asylum seekers spent many years in a centre. It is unclear what the average stay is nowadays.

³⁶ Goffman, E. (1975). *Totale instituties*. Rotterdam: Universitaire Pers Rotterdam.

‘Often families do not have a healthy rhythm. They are just hanging around. Children don’t finish what they have started. They stop mid-eating, don’t do their homework; they lack the concentration. It is very important to talk about this with the mother, to explain that this kind of rhythm is not healthy for children or parents.’ (quote trainer)

The longer people stay in asylum seekers centres, the worse their psychological health becomes³⁷. The long wait, the uncertainty about the outcome of the asylum procedure and other stress factors increase the risk of developing significant health problems. Asylum seekers often say that not the experiences in their home country, but the stress in the asylum seekers centre is the main reason for their problems.

Preventing problems despite child rearing obstacles

Life in an asylum seekers centre is temporary. In many cases, the future is still unclear. Sometimes families are allowed to stay (temporarily), but many parents fear they have to go back. Because of this uncertainty, sometimes exacerbated by what parents have already experienced, some of them live from day to day without thinking about the future. This comes at the expense of what is expected from them as parents in The Netherlands. If parents have a poor mental health, the quality of their parenting suffers. Just surviving takes a lot of energy. But parental support is not always a priority in the centre.

- Parents often think that having the security of a residence permit and an independent home will make it easier to raise their children. This is because Somali parents are often not familiar with parenting as a well thought process. They often presume that in a new environment educating their children will be easier. Waiting for ‘relocation’ is a more logical reaction to them than already participating in parental courses.
- As previously described here, a lot of parents are very suspicious of the way parents raise their children in The Netherlands. A paradox is that parents who feel they are failing in raising their children are more likely to refuse help and advice. These factors can reinforce each other.

Given this background information, it is important to set the right tone when offering support. Experience shows that mothers in particular want support and have practical questions about parenting. However, they want to be able to discuss and share their own views and experiences with parenting. In Nijmegen, trainers emphasise how important it is to try to be neutral: ‘Look for their questions and needs. Discuss the things they struggle with and avoid the term ‘problems’. Many mothers would rather not show their concerns in a group because they are ashamed. Respect this as much as possible.’

³⁷ Laban C.J. (2010). Dutch study Iraqi asylum seekers. Impact of a long asylum procedure on health and health related dimensions among Iraqi asylum seekers in the Netherlands; an epidemiological study. PhD Study. Thesis University Amsterdam.

Child abuse

*Child abuse is 'any form of threatening or violent interaction with a minor which is physical, psychological or sexual, where parents or other people whom the minor is dependent on actively or passively impose, causing serious harm or threaten to prejudice the child in the form of physical or mental injury' (Art. 1 Child care act). Child abuse can have serious consequences to the development of a child. Sometimes there are intergenerational effects. The psychological and social harm and negative economic effects of child abuse are substantial.*³⁸

There are often signs of child abuse in the Somali community. There is no hard evidence to support this since there is no specific research known about child abuse in Somali families in The Netherlands. However, there is indirect 'evidence'. We know that child abuse in The Netherlands among new groups from Africa and Eastern Europe occurs almost three times as much as amongst native Dutch people who are in the same social economic situation³⁹. Researchers say that some of these children are refugees and their parents' traumas have caused a negative effect on the quality of bringing up their children⁴⁰.

There are also many signals that indicate that child abuse is a problem in asylum seekers centres⁴¹. Staff and health professionals see these signs but they are reluctant to take action, perhaps because they feel that they have to keep the information confidential and they do not want to damage the confidential relationship with the asylum seeker⁴². Parents, Somali professionals and volunteers say that it is very common for Somalis to be very strict and use punishment. This used to be common in The Netherlands too during the first half of the last century. The forced departure from their country, daily stress of living in an asylum seekers centre and a poor mental condition are all factors that increase the risk of child abuse. There are many single-parent Somalis and families with relationship problems⁴³. The families are often large. In summary: traditional beliefs that do not see child abuse as a taboo, long term experiences with (war) violence and social and psychological factors mix a dangerous cocktail for Somali children. This threatens a healthy development. It is why it is so important that child abuse is discussed in parenting support.

³⁸ Wolzak, A. & Berge, I. ten (2008). Gevolgen van kindermishandeling.

http://www.nji.nl/nji/dossierDownloads/Gevolgen_Kindermishandeling.pdf

³⁹ IJzendoorn, M.H. van, Prinzie, P., Euser, E.M., Groeneveld, M.G., Brilleslijper-Kater, S.N., Noort-van der Linden, A.M.T. et al (2007). Kindermishandeling in Nederland anno 2005: de Nationale Prevalentiestudie Mishandeling van Kinderen en Jeugdigen (NPM-2005). Leiden: Universiteit Leiden.

⁴⁰ Euser, E.M. (2009). Child maltreatment: Prevalence and risk factors.

<http://www.socialsciences.leiden.edu/educationandchildstudies/childandfamilystudies/organisation/staffformer/euser.html>, geraadpleegd 16-6-2010

⁴¹ Baan, J. (2009). The kids are alright Fase1. Inventarisatie en selectie van interventies gericht op versterking van ouder- en kindcompetenties in asielzoekerscentra. Interne notitie. Utrecht: Pharos.

⁴² Mensinga Wieringa, E. (2004). Kindermishandeling op het AZC "Het zal mij een zorg zijn". Leiden:TNO Preventie en Gezondheid.

⁴³ Abdulrehman, S. & Tuk, B. (2006). Somalische jongeren in Nederland; Botsende culturen.Phaxx 02, 2006, p. 8-10. Utrecht, Pharos

Female circumcision

Female circumcision is a very specific form of child abuse. Female circumcision, also known as Female Genital Mutilation (FGM), happens often in Somalia. Almost 98 percent of adult Somali women are circumcised ⁴⁴. After arriving in The Netherlands, parents are confronted with the fact that all forms of circumcision are prohibited. Youth Health Care in the asylum seekers centres discusses female circumcision if one of the parents is from Somalia (or another so called 'risk country'). They follow a specially developed protocol. Other people who work in the centre, such as midwives and Somali organisations, also try to provide as much information as they can. In some cities, Somali organisations work together with health professionals to offer intensive education on this subject.

Some parents have never known that female circumcision is not as they always believed prescribed by Islam. During a parental course this topic can be discussed spontaneously. The conversation is easier when trainers are prepared for this to come up.

Preparation:

- Find out whether Youth Health Care (YHC) within the centre is already actively informing the parents. Many health professionals use the protocol when they discuss female circumcision ⁴⁵.
- Discuss this with the YHC worker. This prevents health professionals from doing the same thing twice and makes it possible to agree on who does what and gives a view on a possible referral or collaboration.
- Somali staff who run parental courses can already be well aware of the various aspects of FGM. Sometimes they have a 'dual function' when they are also involved in the prevention of FGM as a "*key person preventing female circumcision*". They have followed course for 'key people' and know the backgrounds and the Dutch policy. Sometimes they are active in Somali organisations and set up campaigns against FGM. Also for them it is useful to inform the Youth Health Care.
- Trainers who are not aware of the background of female circumcision, can find information on www.meisjesbesnijdenis.nl. They can find out who can assist them or who to refer to within the asylum seekers centre, for example Youth Health Care workers or the Department of Public Health Asylum Seekers (PGA). Pharos also provides information and advice (www.pharos.nl).

⁴⁴ www.meisjesbesnijdenis.nl

⁴⁵ Youth health care protocol prevention Female Genital Mutilation (www.meisjesbesnijdenis.nl)

Summary part one

This first part describes the specific background of Somalis in The Netherlands and the need to parenting support for Somali refugees. It discussed the social situation, the role of Islam and school performances. The emphasis lies on the desire of parents to give their children a good future in The Netherlands. On the other hand, some specific barriers and challenges are identified, such as the impact of war experiences, poverty, lawlessness and life as an asylum seeker. Child abuse and female circumcision are discussed. It shows that regular parenting courses are only partially, or not at all, useful. In the next part of the book the course as performed three times in Nijmegen is methodically described.

Part II The

course

3 Description of the course

The course in brief

This course described is based on experiences with three courses conducted in the asylum seekers centre in Nijmegen; two courses for mothers and one for fathers. The course was conducted by two cooperating organisations: Het Inter-Lokaal an organization for social and social-legal services, and the Nijmegen Institute for Social Work (NIM), in close collaboration with the Nijmegen COA staff. The course is designed for Somalis who stay in an asylum seekers centre. This target group and the special setting of the asylum seekers centre require a specific approach.

- The course consists of four weekly meetings within one month, all starting at the same time.
- Cooperation with COA, health care organisations and social work during the preparation of the course is important.
- The duration of the meetings is two hours.
- There are fifteen participants. Due to cancelations or new people joining in, this number can vary.

The topics of the four meetings are:

1. Introduction and building trust

Meeting each other
Making appointments
Inventory of questions participants have about raising their children, what are the problems?
Explanation and introduction of the course
Evaluation and inventory of topics for next time

2. Rewards and punishments

Current issues
Rewarding, punishment and ignoring
Evaluation and inventory of topics for next time

3. A good parent

Current issues
Brainstorm about good parenting
Discussion about parenting
Evaluation and inventory of the latest topics

4. What was left, looking back and closing

Current issues
Important themes that have not been discussed yet
Evaluation
Closing

For an impression of what a tailored course can offer, a description of given support follows:⁴⁶.

- *Informative support.* Such as giving information about how Dutch organisations work and the attitude and behaviour that is expected from parents and children.
- *Emotional support.* Give attention and be understanding, have a listening ear.
- *Assessment support.* Talk to the parents about a child or a situation to help them form an opinion.
- *Advisory support.* Giving advice about practical matters such as nutrition or clothing, but also referrals to more specialised help like a member of COA, a GP or a housing association.
- *Support by setting the example.* Show the aspects of your behaviour as a trainer that are important in education (such as attentive listening). Give examples on how you raise your own children.
- *Instrumental support.* Help out with practical matters, such as requesting COA to organise a transfer to another apartment.

It is essential that the trainer can empathise with the group in attitude and skills and is able to connect to what is happening within the group and the community.

Target group and goals

Not all of the following goals are achievable. This is because not all parents are present at all four meetings. Secondly, the flexible approach means not all planned topics are equally intensely discussed. There are also limited opportunities for parents to practice “new” behaviour. For most parents it is the first time they are confronted with the issues that are discussed. One of the important underlying goals is that the Somali parents learn to understand that it is ok to talk about many things in The Netherlands. The course is really an introduction to some subjects that parents will have to deal with many times. Although the following goals are not feasible for all parents, they can serve as a guideline for trainers.

Lessons learned for parents

The parents

- Can give examples on what is expected of them in The Netherlands as a parent.
- Are able to appoint important values of the Somali way of education.
- Can name some positive values of the Dutch way of education.
- Have practiced to reflect on their parenting.
- Have a positive expectation of talking and negotiating with children.
- Have confidence in their role as a parent.
- Have knowledge of parenting skills such as:
 - addressing children;
 - giving children a compliment;
 - giving children attention;
 - accepting the individuality and assertiveness of children;
 - giving children structure.
- Have confidence in their ability to talk to their children teachers .
- Accepting help or referrals in difficult situations.
- Have a global knowledge of the institutions they (may) encounter as parents.

⁴⁶ Nieuwhof A., (2004) Somalische ouders centraal: de aanpak in het project Ondersteuning Somalische gezinnen Gouda: JSO expertisecentrum.

Effect on children

- The effects on parents as described above, even though they are little, can lead to an improvement of the developmental conditions of their children. In time, this would have positive effects on their children on a number of areas:
 - increased self-confidence;
 - the trusting relationship between parent and child is improved;
 - reduction of complaints such as insomnia, stress and loneliness;
 - a decrease of neglect and abuse;
 - appropriate education and performances that match the intellectual abilities of children.

Characteristics and methodological aspects

- **Ethnic background trainers**
 - This course is meant for Somali asylum seekers who speak little Dutch. They can feel ambivalent towards the “Dutch way” of parenting. Therefore, it is important that one of the trainers is from Somalia. If this is not possible, the preference is for a trainer with a non-Western background because of the belief that they have a better connection with these parents. A combination of a professional (non-Western background) trainer working together with a key figure from the Somali community is also a possibility. As mentioned before, there are Somali woman who are educated to be key figures in the prevention of female circumcision. These are mostly woman who speak the Dutch language well and who are experienced advisers. After a short introductory course they could become a trainer on education and parenting. This does require additional preparation and monitoring.
 - When a trainer works with a Somali interpreter, the following things are important:
 - COA staff is often experienced in cooperating with local interpreters. Among the interpreters are usually people who have experience in counselling. Sometimes there is already a “matching” interpreter available within a centre. Ask COA staff for advice on this.
 - The trainer can ask the interpreter service to work with the same interpreter during an entire course. A proper instruction of the program is necessary, including agreements on cooperation including brief evaluations.
 - Although this is not preferred, a Dutch/native trainer can give the course with a Somali or immigrant colleague. A condition is that the native trainer has experience in working with immigrants.
 - Using an interpreter can also have disadvantages:
 - It is time consuming and costly.
 - Especially in a group it is complicated to keep the attention and the overview. Therefore with an interpreter it is even more difficult to be aware of all the interaction.
 - Some young interpreters do not have enough knowledge about their country of origin and therefore miss certain information and wrongly interpret implicit messages.

In summary:

It is ideal to use a Somali professional who has the desired competencies. Besides the language there is another important reason to choose Somali or immigrant trainers. As mentioned before, immigrant parents often do not agree with the educational goals Dutch parents have. This applies strongly to Somalis. Because of limited education and a history of displacement and violence they have become reluctant and suspicious to unknown influences. Other Somalis who are “successful” in The Netherlands can help them cope in the Dutch society and build a bridge. They can be experienced educational trainers, but also social workers or educators in their own language and culture.

- **The course combines parenting support with elements from social work and community work**
 - The combination of parenting support, group social work, social education and a community-oriented approach fits well with the needs of Somali parents. Within this combined approach (current) problems of mothers and their children are addressed. Sharing experiences and learning from each other is the priority. They also discuss leads on how to deal with stress and problems. In Nijmegen, the assumption is that these discussions are continued in the asylum seekers centre. Because not all parents are present at each meeting, the trainers encourage them to continue the discussions after the meetings.

- **The course is demand-oriented and interactive**
 - Somali parents need to learn about the new society, especially about parenting and education. However, they are not used to reflect on their own parenting. This requires a demand-oriented, personal approach as equals. Parents want to know how trainers deal with certain situations and what their opinion is on the way boys and girls interact in The Netherlands and other notable aspects of the Dutch society.
 - The gap between the parenting practice of Somali parents and educational principles that are explained within regular courses is rather big. Somalis do not naturally trust Dutch organisations. Regular educational information and a very structured approach do not work. Therefore, a flexible and culturally sensitive approach is desirable. Some important topics and principles from *Opvoeden en Zo* are discussed, but very well timed and with plenty of room for discussion ⁴⁷.
 - Nationally well known methods for parental support are being more and more revised and improved to be more suitable for immigrant parents. It is therefore important that trainers are aware of the most recent strategies and methods.

- **Goal is a personal approach**
 - The course is based on the principle of learning from each other. Personal experiences, sometimes including those of trainers, are the centre of the course. Discussing specific successful parenting situations motivates people to keep a ‘learning attitude’ during the course.

⁴⁷ Janssen, H., Blokland, G., Ligtermoet I. (2006). *Opvoeden en Zo; Draaiboek voor de oudercursus*. NJI Utrecht.

- Sometimes participants practice what they have learned in situations at home. They talk about their experiences during the next course. (*“Next time we will discuss how it went at home. I will ask you questions about it.”*) If they did not practice, the topic is apparently not adequately discussed or there are other issues with a higher priority.
- Participants review their personal history and talk about how they themselves have been brought up. By focusing on positive and negative experiences parents have had, you can draw parallels to how they are raising their own children. Subconsciously, it can be a repetition of negative patterns. By asking what pain or grief they experienced as a child, parents can come to realise that the pattern is repeating itself and that they have the power to stop this.

Practical examples of taking the cultural sensitive course:

- Playing certain games as an introduction to a program such as throwing a ball and calling the name of the person who has to catch it, is something Dutch native women enjoy but it does not work with Somali women.
- Dutch women expect to sit in a circle. Somali women prefer an arrangement as in a classroom.

Course for fathers

The Somali community in the society and social life has a strict separation between the sexes. Also during informative meetings the men and women are separated. It is therefore preferable that there is a separate course for men and women. Following a course for women in Nijmegen, they organised a course just for men. It was easy to motivate fathers to participate. There were always twelve to fifteen fathers present. Because men do not have as many care duties around the house, they have more time. These fathers are very open to receiving information about parenting in The Netherlands. Where in the presence of women they say that women have the main responsibility in parenting, when they are amongst other men they seem to have a more nuanced opinion on this. They understand that a closer relationship between father and child works well in The Netherlands. It is important that trainers talk to fathers (and mothers) using inclusive language: “It is about how we want to raise our children in The Netherlands”. It is very constructive to address the fathers from the perspective of a common interest. They have no problem with women giving the course. But something that is important for Somali women is probably even truer when it comes to men. Make sure that, as a trainer, you do not announce your own judgments too quickly. They themselves will give examples of situations that show that parenting ‘here’ needs a different approach to parenting ‘there’.

A Somali man, whose wife is in the hospital, emphasises that it is obvious that he takes over her role because he has no other family here. He calls this ‘teamwork’. This is a good term which, when used by a participant as in this example, can become a standard term for all the men in the course. As a trainer it is therefore important to challenge the parents with ‘modern’ ideas and reward them when they follow it up. The trainers can be role models.

Preparation and skills

Preparation

- Organise practicalities and logistical things in cooperation with COA; such as deciding the time (taking into account the rhythm of the participants, mosque attendance, the children's school hours, and other activities), the space (setting up the chairs and tables), any audio-visual equipment and coffee and tea.
- Flyers in the Somali language will be distributed (see appendix) and posters are put up. The poster is an A5 flyer.
- There is a fixed contact person at COA. It is important to provide information to employees of COA, GC A (health centre asylum seekers), PGA (public health care asylum seekers) and social work. Ask them to offer this course to parents who need support and to pass on their names so that they can be actively approached. Then trainers can explain parents what they could gain from the course and they can decide whether they want to participate.
- Provide employees of COA who organise orientation programs at the centre with information about the course. A short educational video on the course can be used which was made during an earlier course ⁴⁸.
- Ask COA employees about the current situation of the group of residents. How long have they been at the centre? Which changes can be expected? Inventory of the key persons and informal leaders. Which families have educational problems?
- Ask about the 'vibe' in the centre, observations, school attendance and recent incidents in and around the centre.

An example of reporting recent incident is about the tension between different ethnic groups in the center. The reason for this is that many Iraqis do not get a residence permit and the Somalis do. When these tensions lead to fights, children as well as parents have to deal with this. Talking about this is useful to parents. Although trainers leave it up to the parents to bring this up, experience shows that these incidents are always mentioned. Trainers need to be prepared for this, which means that in planning the course they need to take some extra time into account to discuss these issues.

- In every centre there are people who are more visible than others, who are respected and have authority. COA staff knows these people and they can introduce them to the trainer. When these parents participate it can have a motivating effect on others.
- The preparation of the meetings happens in the rooms and corridors of the centre. The trainers walk around, talk to people and inform them about the course. Times and dates are agreed on with the participants. They take into account Ramadan, school holidays and festivities.

⁴⁸ This has been prepared. It's unclear whether these video's have been realized

During the course:

- Trainers email with COA staff and other partner organisations to ask for information about current events that may be discussed.

Example: During the course in Nijmegen two incidents are reported to the trainers. There are bicycles stolen at the school, probably by Somali children. There are also groups of Somali and Turkish boys who fight each other. The trainers use this information as background knowledge to guide what is discussed indirectly by asking 'open' questions. They can also ask more concrete questions when mothers bring it up themselves.

Preparation and execution time:

The preparation of the course takes eight hours, not including travel hours.

Tasks are:

- Consultation with partner organisations and the co-executor;
- Talking to COA staff about working together, times, practicalities and planning;
- Make a provisional program. The guidelines from *Opvoeden en Zo*⁴⁹ is very useful;
- Making flyers, go to the location, meeting key figures and recruiting participants.

Providing the complete course takes about twelve hours for every trainer.

Tasks are:

- Giving the course: four times two hours, exclusive the travel time and waiting time for participants;
- Several phone calls, emails, cancellations, changes etcetera: four times half an hour;
- Evaluating with participants after the course: sixty minutes;
- Evaluating with COA staff: sixty minutes.

'It is difficult to start the course on time with Somalis. Once they are present, many of the topics they want to discuss are the same as what other immigrant women want to talk about. But before you get there... ' (quote trainer)

Knowledge, skills and attitude of trainers

In an optimal situation, the trainers have the following skills:

- Skilled in providing parenting courses in groups;
- Able to understand and be sensitive to what people are feeling;
- Know the local social map and infrastructure (such as education) well, also to be able to provide referrals;
- Have background knowledge on Somalis, their migration history, position in The Netherlands and their beliefs on education as described in the first part of this report;

⁴⁹ Janssen, H., Blokland, G., Ligtermoet I. (2006). *Opvoeden en Zo..... ; Draaiboek voor de oudercursus*. NJI Utrecht is in The Netherlands a rather well known parental training program.

- Being aware of their own parental values, the impact it has on your own personal history;
- Being culturally sensitive. Have knowledge about the impact of migration and have experience in working with immigrants, so you know what does and doesn't 'work';
- Know the most common questions and insecurities of foreign parents and be able to talk to them in the right way;
- Understanding of your own prejudices about specific ethnic groups and their different style of parenting. Be alert to your own unconscious, sometimes disapproving reactions. Listen and ask questions and avoid generalisations about the Dutch and the immigrants;
- Being able to appoint the positive values of immigrants and the Dutch;
- Willingness to share personal experiences that have to do with parenting;
- Being inspiring, able to convince people of the value of practicing with different behaviour.

4 Description of the program of courses

Course 1 Meeting and gaining trust

During the first meeting considerable time is spend on getting to know each other, with the intention to create a trusting and safe environment and to gain insight into their needs and important themes. Participants are encouraged to share experiences with other participants.

Goals:

- participants are introduced to each other and learn something about their personal situation;
- they are aware of their specific parenting questions and they know the questions other parents have;
- they know some of the goals of the course;
- they know the appointments within the group;
- they feel safe and have confidence in the trainers;
- they practiced in sharing their experiences.

Activities:

- start;
- meeting each other;
- explaining the goal of the course;
- agree on the rules;
- talk about personal parenting experiences;
- evaluation and inventory of topics for next time.

Start

One of the trainers must already be present and take care of organisational things such as getting the key, coffee and tea and setting up the chairs.

The trainers have been waiting for half an hour, then one of the trainers recognises a woman who is waiting outside. She goes to her and asks where the other women are. They are in the office where they have to report weekly to the Immigration and Naturalisation Services (IND). The trainer goes there and from that moment on the women start coming into the classroom. There are sixteen women between 19 and 62 years old. One of the mothers has seven children, the average is three children. There are two grandmothers who have to take care of children whose parents are deceased or stay elsewhere in Europe.

Introduction ⁵⁰

The introduction is very important and there should be sufficient time for it. In an intercultural setting, it is important to also pay attention to the immigrant history of the family of the participants. People who were 'left behind' and family members who 'ended up' in other countries can strongly influence the daily existence of the participants. This applies strongly to the Somalis who, like other asylum seekers and refugees, have a lot of concerns about their family members, experience the impossibility of a family reunion or who are unable to get in contact.

The Moroccan trainer is leading most of the conversation during the first meeting. The Somali trainer translates, but also adds to what the other trainer is saying. The trainers start with telling the group about who they are, then asking the mothers for their names and asking them about the composition of their family. This conversation usually happens very naturally. The women often tell sad stories. They do this in a resigned way without showing much emotion. Almost all of them have lost family members: sometimes a child, spouse, parents or other relatives. It occasionally involves horrible violence. Many family members live spread across several continents. When participants talk about bad things that they experienced, for example the murder of relatives, the group goes silent. The trainers and participants show their empathy. The trainers thank the participants for their openness. Then other participants also tell their personal stories. A group discussion like this usually happens naturally and even though they discuss 'heavy' subjects, the participants do not show strong emotions and later during the discussion they show that they can also 'just' laugh.

Making appointments

- inform the trainers if you cannot make it or you want to quit. The trainers assume that everyone who signs up will participate;
- confidentiality. Do not talk in public about personal things you hear during the course;
- listen to each other, do not interrupt each other;
- the trainers take turns in leading the conversation;
- agreed assignments will be executed.

Explanation and introduction about the course

In this section the trainers ask parents to explain what they find difficult in raising their children. The intention is to connect the program to their personal experience. Questions they have are discussed during the program. Also, an introduction is given about parenting in general and the purpose of the course. In summary this introduction comes down to the following:

⁵⁰ The Dutch manual *Opvoeden en Zo* (Raising children and such.....) gives a lot of detailed information for 'practises' how to learn to know each other

'Raising children is a form of art. It's fun, but sometimes also very difficult. If one moves to another country, they will notice that the environment is so different that it makes parenting more difficult. This course is designed to offer parents support. We are going to learn from each other during these four meetings. We will talk about the good things, but also about the difficult moments. For example, when your children do not want to listen and you lose your patience as a mother. We will discuss questions parents have as much as possible. Everyone wants to do well. The reality is often different. In Somalia, there are often family members who you can ask for advice. Not here. So we do that in this group. We also look at the differences between parenting "there" and parenting "here". We hope that you trust your own knowledge and experience, but also that you learn new things. We hope that in time you can integrate the best of "both worlds". This cannot happen in four meetings, but we will make a good start.'

It is important from the start to not let the mothers feel that they are doing wrong, but to invite them to ask more questions. In practice it turns out that the women can give each other useful advice. This way, the trainers have a role as a facilitator and not so much as an expert. They do this deliberately. Such meetings should also empower women.

Talking about parenting

Participants are asked what they encounter in their parenting. Below an example of a conversation in a group:

One of the two grandmothers tells the group that she will soon move to a new place. She worries about her grandchild, fourteen-year-old Abdullah⁵¹. He usually keeps to himself, but he can be aggressive at school. If he has to go to a new school, she fears this will get worse. 'When he wants to make a point, he does so with his fists.' His grandmother sees him as an adult who needs to control his emotions. This is what she is used to in Somalia. The discussion is about how to support a boy like Abdullah and what the causes can be for his behaviour. One of the trainers explains that children and young people can be lonely, feel homesick and that it is important to talk to children about their concerns – even if they are almost grown in the eyes of the parent. The trainer talks about personal experiences of the mothers in a reaction to the concern about Abdullah talking with his fists. 'We discuss items such as: when do you get angry, at what point do you feel like hitting someone?' The mothers start to recognise that this behaviour comes from feeling powerless. He lacks the ability to make his point in a different way. This shows that Abdullah is a boy who does not know another way to express himself. Then it turns out that Abdullah is teased and called names in the centre. That is why he starts to fight.

One of the trainers talks about her own situation when she arrived in The Netherlands as a fourteen-year-old. She did not speak any Dutch and how she wanted to prove herself by fighting. Children want to be seen and acknowledged. You can do this by asking what they experience daily and by showing interest. At an appropriate time, try to reflect on emotions. This way you can help them. It is not uncommon in Somalia for children like Abdullah to be considered as adults. But children who see a lot, like Abdullah who lost both his parents, should also be supported. The mothers appear to be ambivalent about

⁵¹ These are not the real names.

talking to their children and considering their feelings. They are not accustomed to speak to their children about emotional issues, but they realise that they, given their experiences, need to talk about this. After this, trainers ask the question: how can children learn to express themselves in other ways, what role do you as a parent have? One of the mothers says she has seven children to raise and no time to start a discussion. Another mother feels you should talk to your children and she makes a comparison with animals. "Animals talk to each other by smell, but we humans do that by sharing experiences and feelings. We should do so with our children too." Then they talk about Abdullah again. His grandmother has never been to his school. Because of the expected move she will have to go there and she also needs to register Abdullah at the new school. She is advised not to hesitate and take up the mother role. Abdullah needs a real parent. Because her Dutch is very bad, she is afraid to go. One of the women who speaks English offers to go with her.

Evaluation and inventory of topics for next time

At the end of the meeting the trainers ask the participants what they think of the course and which topics they should discuss next time. They also mention the theme of the next course: rewards and punishment. It is not uncommon for participants to discuss topics that are not about child rearing but on the asylum process, medical issues or finances. They have a lot of different questions and they do not always ask them at the right place. Also, in some cases they hope to get a second opinion. These topics can be so urgent that they prevent them from talking about other things. One of the trainers said: "Talking about such a topic helps to clear their heads. You often do not have to talk about it in detail, but you should not ignore it. Sometimes you refer them." It is therefore useful that trainers are well aware of a social map and know who does what. A good relationship with COA employees and other support providers is also useful.

After this first meeting, the mothers are very excited. They say they find it very useful to talk to each other and they emphasise the already created solidarity within the group. They agree that they still have many questions. At the end of the course the trainers make an inventory of the topics they will discuss next time. Mothers suggest the following topics:

- Information on special education;
- How to apply for benefits;
- What to do when your child does not want to listen to you.

Course 2 Rewarding, punishment and ignoring

Goals:

- Parents know the main principles of parenting: rewarding, punishment and ignoring;
- They learn that most punishments do not work;
- They learn that hitting is forbidden and they now know alternatives;
- They realise the importance of rewarding children regularly and if necessary ignoring certain behaviour.

Activities:

- start;
- rewarding, punishment and ignoring;
- evaluation and inventory of topics for next time.

Start

The first four women show up to the course half an hour late. Other women are on their way. One of the trainers goes outside and finds the women. They start the course with twelve participants. The trainers start with the topic "being on time" and explain that they have two hours to do the course. In many African countries time is 'elastic', but in Nijmegen a late start comes at the expense of the duration of the course. They agree that one of the older and authoritative women will make sure the women are on time. It is possible to agree on this during the second course because there is already quite a lot of confidentiality within the group. The women promise to do better next time.

The inventory of topics from last time is briefly discussed.

- The question about benefits, coming from a woman who will soon be relocated, is answered with a brief explanation and a folder.
- The question about special education is already answered. One of the trainers has had a meeting with the parent in between courses. This is not uncommon. Some questions are too specific to be discussed in the group.
- The question about children who 'do not listen' will be discussed later.

If there are current issues they are usually discussed. The participants decide if a theme is discussed. The trainers wait, but they know from experience that participants often bring up current issues. Prior to this meeting the trainers received an email from an employee from COA in which they are informed about the bicycle theft at the school of the children. The police came to the centre and this made parents concerned.

When the trainers ask the group how it's going, the first thing they mention is the bicycle theft incident. Some parents feel that COA has made too much of an issue. Some mothers tend to see themselves as victims because others point at them as the guilty ones. They think that they are being falsely accused, they feel stigmatised and they feel they lost face.

In themes that occupy their minds, it is important to stimulate participants to look at the situation from multiple angles, to support each other and where required provide their own solutions. Role play works well to practice this. Experience shows that participants like playing different roles. In 'playing' a role it is not about finding "the truth" but learning to put themselves in the position of the other.

The trainers suggest to answer the question about how to prevent these incidents together. The women have to play the director of the asylum seekers center, director of the school and a few women play themselves. It is a fascinating game. The trainers are amazed at the realism of the game. One of the women is completely captured in her role as director of the asylum center verbally and non-verbally. Even after the game she cannot let go of her role. "You are their mother; you are responsible for your own children. You chose to come here." There is temperament in the debate, but also laughter. The atmosphere remains constrictive even at times that the women disagree. The conversation afterwards is, as expected, on the various responsibilities, including the differences between the social control in Somalia and in The Netherlands. When there is less social control on the streets, for example around the school, it is even more important that parents speak to their children. It should not be allowed that a child suddenly comes home with a different bike and parents do not say anything about it. The discussion is also about the living conditions of the children in the center. They have little to do there, which can make them reckless. They also talk about the small rooms they live in which makes it impossible to keep children inside, but to control them outside is difficult. The mothers say they experience life in the asylum seekers center as a prison. There are no jobs, there are little facilities and they feel that they have little grip on their lives. It also affects their parenting. In other words, it is about the differences in responsibilities parents show. The trainers link the conversation to women who say that they should keep a better eye on their children, also in the center.

Rewarding, punishment and ignoring

After the role play the transition to the theme *rewarding, punishment and ignoring* is not difficult. Because they started the course late and they already did a role play, the Somali trainer does the introduction without room for questions. See appendix two for this introduction.

The mothers have listened carefully to the information and they give examples of behavior of their own children. An incident is mentioned. A Somali child of about eight years old has thrown a key to a woman's head in a rowdy mood. This Ethiopian woman lost control and started beating him. People who saw it let it happen but they regret this afterwards. We talk about punishment, beating when you are angry and how this is not very effective. 'A child does not learn a lot from this and often you feel regret after.

'Then the conversation takes a different direction. The mothers talk about how raising children is so different in the asylum seekers center compared to Somalia. In Somalia people from the village or neighborhood share responsibility, now they are afraid to interfere with one another. They talk about how sad it is that they lose that kind of involvement and that they feel dull. In Somalia a situation as this, beating a child, would be somewhat acceptable, but not in a way as happened here. The discussion is about the extent to which you can hold on to your own values in an asylum seekers center. This is also important to prevent you from losing total control of your own life.

Evaluation and inventory of topics for next time

There is no time for an extensive evaluation. One of the mothers with authority within the group has some nice closing words. "We are no longer there; there you have to show authority and here you should be more of a friend to your child. When you are in a country where people only have one eye, you cover one of your eyes. Try to see the country the way people who live there see it. Adapt." At the end the trainers announce the topic for next time: what makes a good parent?

Course 3 What makes a good parent?

Goals:

- participants see the connection between how they are raised and the way they raise their children;
- participants think about the expectations they have of their children;
- participants are aware of the individual differences between children and the need to connect with that.

Activities:

- start;
- brainstorm about good parenting;
- discussion about parenting;
- evaluation and inventory of topics for next time.

Start:

The course starts an hour later than last week. One of the mothers has serious problems with the IND and in her despair asked the Somali trainer to interpret and mediate. The trainers find that this has the priority. The course can last longer today because both trainers have the opportunity to stay. It appears that the participants carry more responsibility for each other. One of the women who is not present today receives a call from one of the other participants. She appears to be in the hospital with her son who got hit by a car at school. The accident at the school dominates the discussion. The mother who is a participant in the course was present when it happened. The driver drove on, but a Dutch woman wrote down the license plate. We talk about the vulnerability of children in Dutch traffic. In this situation the mother was there, but even then and in other situations as a single parent you are not able to always protect your child. The mothers feel powerless and say that in moments like these that they miss their husbands and other family members.

(The trainer has had contact on the phone several times with the mother of the boy who was hit after this course. The events have made an impact on her, but she cannot immediately help the mother. Finally another Somali care worker helps the mother to talk to people from the COA office and victim assistance. She gets the help she needs there.)

Brainstorm on good parenting

In this part everyone is thinking back about how they have been raised themselves and talk about how this has influenced their views and current parenting practice. The introduction is on the ideas people have on good parenting. The trainers mention teaching children to show respect, offer them good education, being friendly to your children and having a good relationship. They also emphasise the uniqueness of every family. The trainers also ask the question what living in a different country means to the education of children.

The Moroccan trainer says that a child in Morocco can just fall asleep in the living room. "The last thing you hear is your mother's voice from far away: 'Look she has fallen asleep, I will grab a blanket before she gets cold. And those are the last words you hear before you are in a deep sleep.' She talks about the good memories she has of this natural way of going to sleep. This applies to the way of living where you are outside often and you have to adapt your rhythm to the climate and the time when it's dark in the house. In The Netherlands there is a very different rhythm and lots of distractions for children. As a parent it is important to help children by giving them structure and boundaries, that provides them with certainty and predictability.

On a sheet the trainer writes in Somali:

1. What is a good parent?
2. What is parenting?
3. How were you raised?
4. How do you raise your children?

The mothers sit in pairs of two to talk about these questions.

The mothers mention characteristics such as being sweet, patient, protective, peaceful, accepting, giving, appreciating, always being there for your children. But it is also about the tension between the ideal and the reality and the high standards that they themselves set as a parent.

In key words the discussion is shown on the flip-over. They talk about differences between children and how important it is to realise this. This can mean that punishments and rewarding works differently for every child. That is why it is important to know the differences between your children.

Talking about parenting

- The temperament of every child can vary. Is it an active or calm child? Does the child get emotional quickly or are his emotions more evenly?
- The intelligence of every child varies. Parents like to have intelligent children, but not every child can become a professor.
- Is it your first, second or third child? How big is the age difference between the children? Is it a boy or a girl? This can all be of influence on the way children think of life and the way they develop.

It is also important to see what kind of baggage you as a parent have.

- The experiences you have had are also an influence on your child. Are you in a good period of your life or is there much you worry about? That can also influence the way you might react to your child.
- What do you expect from your child? You have an idea of how your child will be, because he looks like you, that makes you incapable of looking at the personal character of the child.
- Parents always want the best for their children. Sometimes they see characteristics of themselves in their child they do not like.

The mothers are visibly interested in this topic and they talk freely about their own experiences. The question about how to live up to the expectations of a society in a different country keeps coming back. They remember the incident of the accident at school. Children in Somalia sometimes walk kilometers a day to school, alone or with other children. Without any premade agreement they are being supervised during their entire walk,. “Not only people in my street, but the whole neighborhood helps raising my child. You know as a parent that everyone is partly responsible and helps in the upbringing. This way, your child is safe, but you also know when your child is doing something wrong.’ During the discussion it shows again that mothers miss this a lot in The Netherlands. In Somalia they learn to share responsibility, they are part of a community. Here, they have to take their own responsibility. This causes conflicts, people tell them they have to be stricter, they have to engage more with their children and it is not acceptable to just let them wonder the streets. A good parent in Somalia is not necessarily a good parent in Nijmegen. But the message the Dutch society gives, is not clear. The Dutch think Somali mothers should be stricter, but they also talk about negotiating with children. How can you combine being strict and negotiate with your child?

One of the women gives a good example of a child that causes a scene at the register in a store. He put a bag of candy in his mothers’ basket and when she tells him he cannot have it, he starts crying. The Somali mother says she was so embarrassed at that moment, everyone is watching, that she leaves the candy in the basket.

The trainers recognise the dilemma. They emphasise that all parents make ‘mistakes’, but that we can learn from it. The mother gets an assignment; when her child is not allowed to put candy in the basket next time, the mother will also start crying so the child realizes that his behavior is not acceptable.

Then someone asks a question often asked by Somali parents. It is about the role the government has to correct parents who do not educate their children in the right way or even ‘take them away’. That is, as we find out, something that Somali mothers already hear even before they come to Europe and it frightens them. They agree that this is a topic they will discuss next time.

Evaluation and inventory of the latest topics

The trainers emphasise at the end of the course how important it is that the women are participating. They compliment the group and ask them what the most important thing is they learned.

This time the trainers emphasise how they recognise that all parents are participating. The participants and the trainers come to the conclusion that being strict means no more than explaining things clearly and being consistent with a child.

Because next time will be the last course, trainers ask what still needs to be discussed.

One of the mothers likes to have more information on learning from children while parenting: 'How can they learn most from us as parents?' Some mothers say they want to know more about organisations such as youth care, youth health care (National Health Services in the UK) and child protection.

Course 4 What was left, looking back and goodbye

Goals:

- discuss topics that have not been discussed yet;
- a good closing and personal goodbye's.

Activities:

- start;
- topics that have not been discussed;
- evaluation;
- closing.

Start

During the fourth course session the women are late again. The excuse they have is that they had to cook something nice since it's the last meeting. They made Sambusa for the trainers. This is a kind of spring roll with minced beef and spices. Everyone is cheerful and relaxed. It takes a while before the participants, with their mouths full, get started. They cannot ask the mother who told the story about the bag of candy last time, since she is not able to be there today.

How does a child learn?

A question that has been asked during the first meeting is how parents can help their children with learning. The trainer explains a few things:

- People can learn from **information** they get. A newborn child does not know much yet, but it is important to start talking to children as soon as possible. At first it does not matter so much what you are saying, but it is important that you invite the child to communicate. When the child grows older, you have to explain things properly, and keep an eye on whether the child understands. Talking to children and giving explanations is a way of learning that is very important in Western countries.
- Learning is often a combination of different things. Children can set a table by **imitating** parents or siblings. By explaining what they are doing, children learn to remember some details even better. Such as explaining about the number of plates and where the knife and fork go. Children imitate much of their behavior from peers. Sometimes they do not know the meaning of what they learn, such as 'dirty words'. Our reaction to it determines partly if they remember what they have learned.
- Learning by undergoing the consequences of your actions. Example: you lose your gloves → you have cold hands. This is **experiential** learning.

To be able to learn, there have to be conditions. The trainer explains it like this:

‘The atmosphere at home is very important to the learning of children and sometimes we do not always see that. We as Somalis and Moroccans are often busy and noisy. But children need a peaceful environment and structure. There has to be time to eat, to do homework and to watch television. Watching television is something you can easily do together. Children can learn much from watching television, but you should not let them control the remote. Watching together is something children often enjoy. When parents let their children talk about what they have done at school every day, this has a positive influence on their development. Sometimes older siblings can help with homework.’

Youth care:

A topic that naturally comes up during parent support of Somali parents is how youth care functions. Sometimes they have questions about youth care agencies, sometimes about the child protection services or the school attendance officer. Almost all parents know stories of other Somalis who have had to deal with these institutions.

A mother talks about a woman she knows whose children have all been placed in care. The mother says she is afraid: ‘What can I do before it happens to me? If I prohibit my daughter from playing in the street and she tells someone at school, will there be an officer coming to my house?’ Another woman adds to this and tells about a family where a professional counselor stayed in their home for weeks to observe the family. During the discussion it becomes clear that all women know stories like this, even the women who just arrived in The Netherlands. One of the women says that she has already heard stories like this about The Netherlands when she was still in Somalia.

Both trainers explain from their personal experience what the different organisations do. The youth health clinic is also discussed. They dismantle some myths.

- The first myth is that every child that complains about his parents or talks about child abuse, is removed from his home. The trainers explain partly from their own experience as counselor how the procedures work and that in 99 percent of the cases the organisations treat parents and children very carefully. The procedures have different steps which are very well described. Families are not monitored without reason. Something serious must have happened. One bruise on a child is not the basis for a family investigation. The school does notify an institution if a child comes to school in bruises often. But even then, child care tries to solve the situation within the family. Only in immediate danger the child is removed. The trainer explains that parents sometimes withhold information because they are suspicious. In that case, an employee of the child protection services can draw the conclusion that parents are lying and not cooperating. She stresses that Somali parents should have more confidence in the institutions.
- A second myth is the story of one of the mothers who says that the examination at the youth health clinic is a cover to check if a child is being abused. The trainers explain how important it is that these clinics are there and that many immigrant mothers are often happy with the advice they get. The nurses and doctor keep an eye on the development and education of every young child in The Netherlands. Sometimes they can ask critical questions about parenting, sometimes they ask parents whether they ever slap their child. One special form of child abuse obliges youth health clinics to act immediately. Female circumcision is prohibited by law in many European countries. Therefore there is a national protocol that nurses have to talk to Somali mothers about this.

The story of a conflict at home resulting in an outplacement of a Somali girl leads a tough discussion. The girl had a relationship with a boy whom the parents disapproved of.

One of the trainers asks a mother what she would feel like if her son came home with a girlfriend. There is a discussion about the differences between boys and girls. The women have different views on this. One of the mothers wonders to what extent they can prohibit the choice of partner of their children in The Netherlands. Another mother says she fears that prohibiting leads to losing her daughter's trust and her daughter will not come to her when she really needs her. Someone else agrees and says: 'In The Netherlands we have to stand next to our children and try to be friends'. But not everyone agrees. Some women strongly disapprove of the relationship and rely on the Koran for guidance in these issues. Others are shy and visibly uncomfortable to talk about this topic. The trainers praise the women for their honesty and emphasise that different opinions can coexist. They say it is valuable to share views and accept them.

Evaluation

The evaluation takes place according to the following questions:

- Why did you participate?
- What did you think of talking about parenting in this group?
- What did you think of the atmosphere?
- What did you think of the size of the group?
- How did you feel about having two trainers?
- Which topics applied to you?

- Are there topics you would have liked to discuss but they did not come up?
- Did you have the chance to say what you wanted to say?
- Did you ever feel you were forced to talk when you did not want to?
- Do you feel the course helped you? If yes, in what way? And you child(ren)? If yes, in what way?
- Have you practiced what you have learned and how was that?

The mothers are very enthusiastic and say they would like to follow up on the course. They spontaneously mention new knowledge about rewards and punishments.

- A mother explains she has set rules for her children for watching television. She heard this from one of the other mothers from last course. Every fifteen minutes the children can select a program.
- One of the mothers is very proud when she explains that she mediated between her two sons on the choice of a television channel. She remained calm, and a good compromise was possible. She thanks the trainers for teaching her with that.
- A mother who used to slap her child, now says it is enough to threaten that her child has to go in the corner, and her child listens. She is pleased with this new way of disciplining.
- Following the discussion on the importance of rewarding a mother says that she takes her child outside as a reward for good behavior and that the relationship has improved.

The mothers would like to continue for longer. They want to discuss topics that have briefly been discussed in more depth next time. They need more information and would like to know more from an expert on budgeting and the Dutch education system.

Closing

The trainers say goodbye to all participants in person and sometimes refer to the personal stories that have been discussed during the course, such as the asylum procedure, reunion with family or planned relocation.

The participants are very positive. Some mothers who have only been to a few meetings say they hope that they can join again next time. The women thank the trainers and the mothers wish each other well.

Afterword

During these courses it becomes clear that, even though the preparations are done thoroughly, participants are often late or do not show up. A lot of time is lost and the continuity lacks because of this. Being late or not showing up does not mean that the women do not appreciate the course or the trainers; the evaluation shows that all the participants are very enthusiastic. It is likely that one of the reasons is that this was an additional activity in the centre that has not been sufficiently incorporated in the set of activities. For the future it is important to coordinate this course with other services at the centre. It is also recommended to inform staff of the Health Centre Asylum Seekers (GC A) and the Public Health Asylum Seekers (PGA). The trainers think this course would be more successful if it was an integral part of the COA official orientation program. But they doubt whether this is practically and financially feasible.

Appendix 1 Flyer

Women and raising your children

Course Raising your children for Somali women in the asylum seeker centre in Nijmegen



Vrouw en opvoeding

*Cursus Opvoeden in Nederland
voor Somalische vrouwen in AZC Nijmegen*

Dumarka iyo barbaarinta carruurta

Casharo goos goos ah oo lasiinayo hooyooyinka Soomaaliyeed kuna saabsan tarbiyadda carruurta kunool wadankan Nederland. Lagana bixinayo AZC Nijmegen

De cursusdata zijn:

Dinsdag 23 maart
Dinsdag 30 maart
Dinsdag 6 april en
Dinsdag 13 april

Recreatiezaal
F- gebouw
10.30 – 12.00 uur

Gratis

Cashiradani waa
Lacag la'aan

Voor meer informatie en aanmelden bel:
Wixii faah faahin ah kala xiriira:

**Aziza Baabbi (NIM):
06-3400 0404**

**Keen Mahamed (Inter-lokaal):
06-8108 5312**

Of bel Het Inter-lokaal: 024-322 22 27
www.inter-lokaal.nl

HET Inter-lokaal



COA Centraal Orgaan opvang asielzoekers

nim
nim maatschappelijk werk

Appendix 2 Rewarding, punishment and ignoring.

This section is based on: Husmann N. & Bakker. I *Positief omgaan met kinderen. Praktijkboek voor ouders en andere opvoeders.* (1985. Dekker van de Vegt/ Nijmegen) and on the internal guide *Handleiding oudercursus NIM.*

Rewarding, what is that?

Rewarding is when you emphasise good behaviour of your child. Your child feels positively stimulated. You can reward by showing that you are happy with his or her behaviour, by giving them a treat or doing something fun such as visiting grandma.

There are three ways of rewarding:

- Social reward. This is something between you and your child, such as giving him a hug or a compliment.
- Material reward. This means giving something, such as candy, money or a present.
- Doing something together. Such as going for a bike ride, play a game or go to the playground.

Rewarding, how and when do you do this?

- As quickly as possible after your child has done something right (the younger the child, the more important this is).
- Every time when the child does the same thing right.
- Choose a reward that your child really likes.
- If you reward too often, it does not have an effect anymore.

Only reward behaviour that you think is positive. So it is better to not give your child candy when he begs for it. This way, the child learns that begging helps to get what he wants. By giving him a treat when he is quietly playing, he learns that this is rewarded. Note that you do not reward too much when a child does exactly what you command, such as cleaning the room. This makes children only do things when they are asked to do them. Rewarding spontaneous good behaviour has a better effect.

Punishment, what is that?

Punishment is showing your child the negative consequence of doing something you do not want him or her to do. You can punish your child by: raising your voice, becoming angry, cursing, ridiculing, beating, isolating your child or withholding money.

Try to minimize punishment and avoid humiliation and beating. In acute danger it may be necessary to be very firm. For example: when a small child gets too close to the water, you can pull it's arm hard.

The disadvantages of punishment are greater than the benefits:

- It deteriorates the relationship between parent and child.
- If the parent is gone, there is a chance that the child will still do it in secret.
- Some children ask for attention by showing unwanted behaviour and therefore keep doing it.
- You are giving a bad example, the child will also start hitting or cursing.
- The effect of punishment only lasts for a short while.
- A child learns more from rewards than punishments.

If you must discipline:

- Do not punish too much and not too long. For example: do not make your child return stolen candy and do not ground him for two weeks. Do not punish heavier than the offense.
- Discipline in a way which has something to do with the offense.
- Explain very clearly which behaviour you are punishing them for and why.
- Let your child know which behaviour you do not want.
- Be consistent in which behaviour you punish your child for and in the punishment itself.
- Let your child know that a punishment has a beginning and ending. At some point, the punishment must be over.

Ignoring, how do you do that?

Ignoring is: not responding to unwanted behaviour. So do not completely ignore the child, but only ignore certain behaviour. Ignoring is often more effective than punishment, but it is harder on the parent because at first children show the unwanted behaviour more because they are waiting for a response.

How do you do that?

- look away from the child;
- do not respond to the child;
- keep doing what you are doing or walk away from the situation;
- have a neutral facial expression;
- start ignoring as soon as the child shows unwanted behaviour;
- finish the ignoring with rewarding.

Examples:

1. A mother has two children who often argue with each other. The mother is desperate and gets angry often which is counterproductive. She decided to do it differently and leaves the room to ignore the argument. This is only possible when there is no danger involved. Initially, the argument intensifies. The mother hears the children scream and has to retain herself from walking back into the room. But then it stops. The children have noticed that there is no response. They no longer like the argument and stop. When the mother comes back in the room, they are calm. She walks in and immediately compliments them: "You are playing so nicely".
2. A child learned new curse words at school and tries them out in the house. If you get angry immediately, the child gets attention. Children want to push the limits sometimes and repeat this over and over again. Some children would rather have negative attention than no attention. Getting angry stops the behaviour, but only temporarily. By ignoring the child, it does not get a response and the unwanted behaviour disappears quickly.

When it comes to parenting it is often about finding the right mix. Reward often, ignore often and only punish sometimes.

Appendix 3 Feathers on your cap, giving children compliments

The following information on giving children compliments is used in the course. This text is taken from the brochure: 'Pluimen en kinderen complimenten geven'. This folder can be downloaded from several websites. www.okpunt.nl

How can children earn a feather on their cap?

Children do a lot of things that can earn them a feather on their cap, for instance when they:

- tie their own shoelaces;
- take the trash out;
- hang their clothes in the closet and not throw their things all over the place;
- when they are happy to go to school;
- when they clean up their toys;
- when they behave well if there is company;
- when they pee in the toilet (and not next to it);
- when they are on time for dinner;
- when they do not interrupt when you are watching your favourite show;
- when they ask for a treat and not just take it;
- when they do not argue with their brother or sister;
- when they take off their muddy boots at the door;
- when they do not destroy the tower of blocks their little brother made;
- when they tell stories about what they did at school.

Good for the self-confidence!

Every now and then, every child does something that cannot be tolerated. Parents are free to say something about this. Children want clear rules and boundaries.

But children also need to know when they do something right. When a child tries his best at school, he is very happy when you compliment him on that. And when gives a helping hand in cleaning or runs an errand without arguing, a feather on your cap is an encouragement to help out more frequently.

But giving a compliment does more.

A compliment also gives a child a sense of self-confidence. It makes them grow.

Giving compliments, that is real parenting!

Giving compliments: how do you do that?

Giving feathers or a compliment is not difficult at all. The easiest way is looking at what your child does and saying something nice about it. For example: 'You have put the groceries in the cupboard for me. That pleases me.'

Or: 'Hey! You are on time for dinner, that makes me happy!'

Some parents do not reward children with feather, but with money or a treat. That can work as well, but children can become dependent on rewards like these: they will only help doing the dishes if they get something in return. There are better ways:

- Say something nice to your child;
- Wink at them or give a kiss;
- Give them a hug;
- Read them a story as a reward.

When children often get a compliment...

- it becomes clear to them what they can and cannot do. This is a safe feeling for children;
- they sleep better at night because they feel safe and secure;
- they might even try harder at school;
- they do not have to use other ways to get your attention;
- you can see them grow every now and then;
- you will start to like them more.

When does YOUR child earn a compliment?

Observe your child unnoticed for an hour. Look at everything he does. Try to write those things down. When you finish after an hour, read all the things your child did:

- What things did you dislike or disapprove of?
- To what things can you just turn a blind eye?
- And what was something that you could have given your child a compliment for?

If you write down, you will see that your child does many things to earn a compliment. And really, you earn a feather on your cap too. Because if your child does so many good things, you must also do the right things!

Tips for giving compliments:

1. Praise your child as much as possible for good behaviour.
2. Pay as little attention as possible on bad behaviour.
3. Compliments really work when you give them regularly: give a compliment, a pat on the shoulder or a wink at least ten times a day.
4. If you want to give your child a compliment, do it immediately. Do not wait until tomorrow, then the child will not remember why you are complimenting him.
5. Does your child react 'strangely' to receiving a feather? Maybe it needs to get used to it. Do not give up, keep on giving feathers.
6. When you give a compliment, be as honest as possible. Do not exaggerate, children are on to that quickly.
7. Is there nothing you can think of why your child should get a compliment? Then calmly look at what your child is doing every now and then.
8. When you give compliments, do not skip yourself: after all, you are doing your best as well.

Appendix 4: Fears of a child

The following information written by Aziza Baabi can be used as background information when working with mothers who are anxious and/ or protective. The bingo game listed below (derived from a theme box *Angsten (Fears)* from the *Stichting Spel en Opvoedingsondersteuning (JSO centre of expertise on youth, society and development)*) is not used in this form by the trainers. This is because the examples cited here on dangers in daily life in the lives of children “then and now” is not always recognisable to immigrant mothers.

Transferring information

Fears of your child, how do you handle this?

Fears have to do with feeling unsafe. Parents are responsible for the safety of their children, especially when the children are very young. As a parent you try to ensure nothing happens to your child.

However, you cannot prevent everything and if something happens, you often feel guilty.

- A child should learn to cope with dangers.
- When a child cannot see the danger, parents should make sure nothing happens. Gradually, the child will learn to see the dangers. He/ she must be able to manage in dangerous situations. This is a slow process, it does not change overnight. As a parent you need to set different boundaries and let go of the child. Prohibiting and controlling starts to become less.
- As a parent you should set the boundaries. You point out the dangers and explain your children about them. Together with the child you look for ways to avoid danger. For example: you tell them that crossing the road is dangerous, that cars can drive fast and that you should look both ways carefully before crossing. Make sure you explain things on the child’s level, so your child will understand.
- Ultimately it is not good to protect a child too much. The child remains too dependent on the parents, it does not learn to take care of himself. It is always horrible when something happens, but they can learn from small accidents. Not being allowed to play outside with other children is disappointing for children. It is important that they can play with each other, even though it can be risky.
- It depends on the child in what way they can make their own judgments, but it also depends on the development of the child. One child is not the same as another, you have to accept that. And you yourself are the way you are as well. It is good to express your fears, just as sadness or anger. Do not keep it in, show your emotions, but preferably not too much to your child. You can also express your fears by talking about it with someone from social work. Try not to pass on your fears to your child. Try to broaden your boundaries in little steps.

The bingo game *What have you had as a child?*

Ate medication/ drugs	Fell through a glass door	Hurt leg/ arm on barbed wire	Broke arm/ wrist	Fell off bicycle
Chocked in object	Cut with knife	Finger in the door	Feet between spokes	Fell off a horse
Got hurt during gym class	Got burned by hot liquids	Injured by tools	Fell of the spinning wheel	Slipped in the bath tub
Stepped in nails/ glass	Got injured rollerblading	Injured by glass object	Fell off the stairs	Burnt fingers
Burned by playing with fire	Bleeding head injury	Fell from tree	Tooth through lip	Bitten by a dog

Appendix 5: Pitfalls in education

Force

In parenting, forcing a child to do something always backfires: a child that is forced will resist. It is a lot more enjoyable to have a relationship with your child that does not involve coercion. You and your child will feel better to do something for the each other because you chose to, because you care for each other. When you have sufficient authority, the child will do as you say. Maybe the child will complain, but as long as it respects and accepts your authority as a parent, that is ok. This way, you do not need to use power tools.

Power struggle

From forcing it is only a small step to a power struggle. When someone wants to impose his will and hardly takes the other person into account, he exercises power over that person. Power can be shown by using violence; physical and/ or psychological and material manipulation (such as withholding an allowance). The relationship between parents and a child can become a power struggle, in which the power can lie with the parent or the child. The child can enforce something by acting on the weakness of the parent; such as criticising her crazy mother (she has had a burn-out) or to force arguments the mother cannot handle such as threatening to run away or suicide. The child forces her mother to get her way. Small children can exercise power by not eating or sleeping. Someone who exercises power, constantly faces someone who feels powerless.

Not offering space for development

For the individual development of a child it is important that it learns who he/ she is; learns to break free from their parents and stand on their own two feet. Letting go of children is one of the most difficult tasks in parenting. Parents tend to protect their child, but when they become too protective, they limit the development of their child. These children are very much reliant on their parents and later in life from others or from a relationship. The child has not learned to stand up for itself, to have confidence. A child who does not receive confidence from parents, does not learn to trust themselves and has an increased risk of being bullied. Parents should set some boundaries of behaviour, but the child should have the possibility of exploring things and gaining experiences.

Following and checking

Relationships are based on trust. When you trust a child and believe what he says, make sure he knows that. This encourages the child to be honest. When honesty is disapproved of or punished, the child will not tell the truth easily next time. It is better to punish them for being dishonest. When parents check up on their children constantly, want to know what they are doing at all times and do not give them any space, children have very little space for themselves. This can cause them to lie, which makes parents check them even more.

To warn

Warning for danger: be careful, that is hot; watch out, a car is coming. This is something you do often as a parent. It happens frequently that a parent says to a child that he should stop whining and he adds: I'm warning you! However, to warn very often without actually acting on it, loses its power when it has no meaning.

Threaten

There is no point in threatening with something if you are not willing or able to do what you say. Threatening and warning is usually a sign of weakness. Somebody who has authority does not need to threaten; the child will adapt its behaviour because it learned to do so, even though it complains that you are being strict. There is no need to shout or curse and you do not have to scare your child.

Shouting and cursing/ strengthening of behaviour

If a child exhibits unusual behaviour, such as whining for an ice cream, and the father gives in to the whining, he enforces this whining behaviour: because it shows it has an effect.

Spoiling

If you give your child everything he asks for and more, he takes it for granted. He thinks it is normal to get everything he wants and expects so, always and anywhere. The child gets angry when it does not get what it wants, which leads to conflicts with others. Spoiled children are rarely satisfied. And, almost everyone will start to detest spoiled children.

Being able to say no and being able to accept a rejection

Many parents who complain because their children are not listening, seem to have trouble themselves with hearing and accepting a rejection. Often these are people who cannot cope with criticism. If parents feel rejected when they are criticized, they will also feel this way in situations where you have to say 'no' to your child as a parent. Saying to your child 'you are annoying' is vague. It is better and more clear to say 'I do not want you to do that anymore', when you specify 'that'.

The 'why' question

Asking 'why' can easily be interpreted as an attack or an accusation. The other person may become defensive. You cannot answer some questions, such as 'why did you knock over that glass of milk?'. The 'why' question often leads to ambiguities and tensions because the question implies that you are looking for someone to blame. Instead of asking: why did you do that (knocking over glass of milk), it is a lot clearer to ask: how did that happen?

Vague messages

Vague messages do not clearly indicate what you expect or want from the other person; 'don't be such a baby, can you not just act normal, just behave'.

Asking when you already know the answer

When a situation is very clear, you do not ask your child if he did something. You state that he did.

Appendix 6 Top ten tips for parents

Source: <http://www.duimelotzenderen.nl/>

1. When your child wants to tell you or show you something, stop for a minute with what you are doing. Give your child the attention that he needs. One minute is often enough. Brief moments of genuine attention make sure your child learns to entertain themselves better and ask less for negative attention.
2. Be generous with physical affection – children love to be touched and cuddled, and they love to hear often how much you like them.
3. Have regular conversations with your child. Talk about things he is interested in. Also, tell them as a parent what you have experienced that day.
4. Compliment your child often and tell them what you like in their behaviour. For example: 'thank you for cleaning up your toys right after I asked you to'. An explained compliment ensures that your child will exhibit this behaviour more often.
5. Provide activities that interest your child so it learns to play alone. For example: clay, coloring, blocks, board games, dress up clothes, etcetera. Children who enjoy playing will be a lot less difficult.
6. Teach your child new skills by doing them yourself first. For example: how to ask something in a polite way. Encourage your child to try it too. Compliment your child when it is successful.
7. Set clear house rules so your child knows how to behave. Involve your child when you set the rules. Also discuss what the consequences will be if the rules are violated.
8. Keep calm when your child shows unwanted behaviour. Tell your child to stop his behaviour and also tell him what he can do instead. For example: 'stop arguing about the computer. You can take turns'. Compliment your child when it follows your instructions. If the child does not listen and keeps showing the same behaviour, a consequence must follow.
9. Be realistic in what you expect of your child. You can expect reasonable behaviour from your child, but do not expect it to be perfect. Everyone makes mistakes and most children do not do this on purpose.
10. Be realistic in what you expect of yourself as a parent. Parenting takes a lot of energy and ideal parents do not exist. Make sure you rest and you can relax. This way it is easier to meet the needs of your child.

More information on positive parenting can be found on www.triplep-nederland.nl and www.positiefopvoeden.nl.

Appendix 7 Evaluation for Somali mothers

An additional evaluation has been held in the context of the development of this course. Fourteen participants are present from two different courses. Six of them raise their children without their husband. There are also two women who are grandmothers raising their grandchildren because their parents are not here. Bram Tuk leads the conversation, trainer Keen Mahamed and an interpreter are also present.

This evaluation has been added as an appendix because:

- 1. It shows what the result can be of such a programme and demonstrates the use of the course.*
- 2. The themes mentioned in asking what mothers struggle with, correspond with what is known from research literature on education in immigrant families.*

Despite clear communication in advance and an appropriate chosen time for this evaluation, the meeting starts an hour late. From the meeting room we see the women gather long before they come in. The interpreter from Somalia says: 'Somalis are like gnu's crossing a river in Africa. Only if the group is big enough they dare to cross. It is safer that way.' During the discussion women continue coming in and leaving again. In some cases these are not participants, but younger female relatives of the participants. There is also a number of small children and infants. We do not tape the discussion because the trainers advised against this. Participants would probably have reacted negatively to this.

After a long and informal introduction, we start the discussion on what the participants have learned. This takes about half an hour. The discussion leader leads the conversation but in a limited way. This discussion form connects to the way the courses were conducted and feels more natural for this group of women. Too much structure would inhibit the interaction and spontaneity which could reduce the authenticity. Below is a summary of the discussion:

What have the mothers learned?

The central question is what the mothers have learned during the course. 'We have learned a lot. We know now that this is a different culture and that you have to adapt because otherwise you get stuck. We want to settle here. We have discussed a different approach in parenting. In Somalia people are very strict, here you parent your children by talking to them.' When asked if you can 'just' learn that from a course a participant replies: 'Not everything can 'just' be learned, but you can learn how to become friends with your children.'

- Do not react too impulsive, but try to settle your anger first and explain properly what you expect of your child.
- Watch the time more closely. This is important when you have appointments, but also in the house to create a more structured rhythm. Then children are less tired when they have to get up early.
- Every age needs a different approach. Older children ask a lot more explanation.
- Female circumcision is not prescribed in the Koran and you no longer need to do this.
- Do not leave everything up to the school as a parent, but really work together.
- Be consistent, do not always let your child have its way when it is whining.
- Do not let children watch television all day long.
- When you are less hot-tempered, your children will also be calmer.
- Leave children their dignity and do not humiliate them.
- Punish in different ways. Use less harsh punishments.

A mother says she does not hit her children as often anymore. 'You can also just put them in the corner' and 'I have noticed that if I mention the word punishment, that is usually enough'.

Another mother says: 'In Somalia your neighbor also raises your children. If a child is expelled from school, he will be asked about this on his way home. Here, others do not do that, not even in the asylum seekers centre. Here you are responsible yourself.'

Spontaneously a mother says how important it was that the trainers were willing to share their experiences as mothers in The Netherlands. She feels this is very important because it makes the course more credible. 'They go through the same things as us'.

Question of the trainer: what should we do differently next time?

- Talk to people more often in advance, knock on their doors, and invite them to the course.
- Go to all the rooms in the asylum seekers centre, now not everyone knows you personally so they will not participate.

The trainer says she did do that, but apparently not enough.

- But in general it appears that participants are 'just very positive' and they indicate that they learned a lot.

When asked what the fathers think of the course, the women tell them that they talk to their husbands about what they hear during the meetings. They feel it is important to do so because they hope they can cooperate more with the men in educating their children. They think the course is also important to men.

Which topics are difficult to mothers?

The mothers have been very positive about the course the entire discussion. It is not unlikely that they give socially desirable answers. To determine which topics remain difficult, the discussion leader asks them what they think is odd in Dutch parenting. The answers are not just about parenting, but they are similar to issues that are difficult to many other immigrants as well:

- The fact that boys and girls see each other freely. A ten-year-old girl who already has a boyfriend is very odd according to one of the participants.
- The obviousness in The Netherlands of children leaving home when they turn eighteen years old.
- Homosexuality.
- The fact that children do not naturally take care of their parents.
- The fact that the elderly live isolated from their family.

Conclusion

There are many mothers who came to this meeting. The group discussion shows that participants have gained knowledge through the course on specific Dutch parental values and standards. The mothers also appoint many parenting skills they have learned and used in educating their children. The effect on their self-confidence of this has not been discussed, but the mothers seem to be confident about the way they parent by the free way they share their experiences. This freedom is also visible when they mention topics that are difficult to them. We can cautiously conclude that the course has taught them to reflect and that they intend to use the new developed parenting skills. It also seems as though the gap between the Dutch and the Somali way of parenting has become smaller.

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