



Better parenting is the aim of AÇEV

SEVİM SONGÜN - Turkish Daily News

W Around 15 men of different ages, various economic levels and professions, whose only point in common is being fathers, are coming together in a classroom each week to learn how to communicate, understand and listen to their children; in other words, to learn how to become better fathers. Those who are acquainted with family structures in Turkey know well that it is not easy for a man to participate in such lessons. This is why the fathers who attend the Father Support Program, organized by Mother Child Education Foundation (AÇEV), are seen as both inquiring and brave.

The Father Support Program (FSP), first started some ten years ago to provide fathers with training that increases their level of knowledge of child development, now seeks to furnish them with communications skills, and consequently causes them to adapt to a more democratic attitude. "The democratic attitude basically means that the child is an individual, she or he has rights and duties regardless of her or his age," said Deniz Dođruöz, a specialist from FSP. "The child has the right to use their pocket money the way she or he decides to, however, in certain ages she or he also has to have certain responsibilities, too, such as going shopping on his or her own," said Dođruöz. All the participant fathers at the Zühtüpaşa primary school are happy with the program.

"Many things have changed in my family relations since I joined this program," said Kubilay Nuhoglu, a father, while waiting for the next session in the school's garden. During these sessions, fathers sit in their children's classroom and often find themselves returning to their childhood where they put themselves into their children's shoes. The program not only provides training in child development but also in communication skills. "The program changed my way of communication, not only with my children but also with my wife, friends and colleagues," said Nuhoglu, an accountant. The fathers talk, play and learn with each other without getting bored for two-and-a-half hours once a week. "I listen to Ali Ufuk (his son, 10) more carefully than before and I think twice now since his opinion may be more correct than mine," said Muharrem Yıldırım, another participating father.

The programs only for fathers are almost non-existent, both in Turkey and worldwide, however, AÇEV sought to provide training programs to 22,000 fathers in Turkey. The foundation has taken on a difficult task since, even participating fathers argue, that many fathers are not willing to join because of social prejudices and reactions from their peers. "There are some 1,000 children in this school, but only around 20 fathers have been participated in this program, where are the rest?" asked Şinasi Tek, another father in the class.

All the fathers have different reasons for joining this program, however, all of them have

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one reason in common: to become a better father. While they are coming from different backgrounds and experiences, all of them believe that education continues in any age and everyone should try their best to learn more. Also, they all have a star in their eyes when they talk about their children. "We cannot raise our children with the method our families used. The technology and standards of living, as well as social structure, is changing," said Cemal Bulut, a father of two girls. The fathers agree that the program made them discover parenting mistakes and reinforce positive behaviors.

"These fathers already have learned Socratic skills," noted Deniz Dođruöz, one of the educators for the program. "They are asking questions and listening to each other in order to find the right ways to live their lives," said Dođruöz, and added that what they are trying to do is not giving fathers advice, but making them think about their attitudes and feelings. Fathers are also happy with learning these techniques. "This program made me realize everything I do is not right. There are things that I can learn from my children," said Bulut, a shipbuilding engineer. "When we discuss a situation and everyone states their opinion, it becomes easier to change our wrong attitudes," said Bulut.

Topics in class include the father's role in the family, the importance and impact on the child of the father, family attitudes, acceptance of the child's behavior and active listening, 'I' language, positive discipline techniques, conflict resolution methods, developmental char-

acteristics of the child, the importance of reading to the child, time spent together with the child, and playing with the child make up the content of the FSP.

The result shows that those issues are crucial in the preschool-education of the child. "I spent more time with my children and Berfin (his daughter, 9) has started to talk to us about her problems," said Bulut. "Berfin was not happy at her school, however, after I participated in ten weeks of FSP, she even gave a guitar concert at her school, it was an astonishing change in our family." He said that both he and his wife's relation to their daughter had previously been reduced to overseeing her education before the program. "We were only telling her, repeatedly, to study her lessons and we lost our communications because of this," said Bulut, and added the FSP helped him solve this problem. The children are also aware of their fathers' effort and that changes the relationship in a positive way. "My daughter knows that I am coming to this program for her and she brings my documents and walks me to the door every week," said Şinasi Tek, proud of what he is doing for his children.

The program is open to fathers who have children ages two to ten years. Volunteer educators and social workers, trained through ACEV-organized seminars, implement the courses in 13, three-hour sessions. The FSP, developed by ACEV, is run with the participation of the Ministry of National Education's Apprenticeship and Non-Formal Education General Directorate, and the Special Education Guidance and Counseling Services General Directorate. The FSP, the Mother Child Education Program and the Preschool Parent-Child Education Program, were developed by ACEV, and are now implemented by educators attached to the Ministry of National Education. ACEV provides training for educators leading these programs, as well as supervision during the implementation. The Functional Adult Literacy Program is run within the context of a protocol signed with the Ministry of National Education.

AÇEV was founded in 1993 through the initiative of founding president, Ayşen Özyeğin, and based upon the scientific research of Prof. Dr. Çiğdem Kağıtçıbaşı and Prof. Dr. Sevdâ Bekman. Through the end of 2007, the foundation had reached some 410,000 mothers, fathers and children in 78 provinces.

7 is too late seeks to raise awareness

The FSP remains an acclaimed project and ACEV has begun working in Turkey; the foundation also has other leading projects, which are first-of-their-kind, in Turkey. ACEV has begun to organize a campaign entitled, '7 is Too Late', that seeks to raise public awareness regarding the vital importance of ages zero to six years early childhood education. The campaign targeted the government, too, and aimed to have pre-school education as a priority in Turkey.

The government has included the campaign in its 2007 program and now plans to

increase the number of children enrolled in preschools to 50 percent by 2013. Early childhood, spanning zero to six years of age, is the time when children develop the quickest. Two-thirds of all intellectual development is completed between the ages of zero to four years, according to studies of ACEV. "Although Turkey has a large, young population, only 28 percent of the 2.5 million children between the ages of four to six are able to benefit from preschool education services," said Nevin İhan, a manager from the ACEV Communications Department.