

The Parenting Journey

Rifle Middle School

Rifle, CO



COLORADO
Department of Education

Connecting with other parents on parenting challenges and successes is an empowering way for schools to get parents and families to collaborate with one another and with the school. Rifle Middle School in Rifle, Colorado is using The Parenting Journey curriculum to do just that.

The Parenting Journey is a twelve-week curriculum best facilitated in a group no larger than 10. Each session is two-hours long. In a safe and nurturing small group environment, parents have the opportunity to reflect on their strengths, examine the way they were parented, make decisions about what they want to keep and/or change, and set goals (either personal, parenting, or family). Parents also learn ways to take care of themselves to be a more present and patient parent. Over the course of the twelve weeks, parents build relationships with each other that may continue to form a base of support long after the course is finished.

The principal and assistant principal at Rifle Middle school planned and implemented The Parenting Journey with the assistance of the bilingual parent liaison. Each session builds on the previous week's discussion, and so staff found it crucial to have parents commit to the whole 12 weeks. Parents also may feel uncomfortable sharing personal information when others are dropping in and out—emphasizing consistent attendance can insure that The Parenting Journey sessions are a safe place to share.

Rifle Middle School hosted one group in the fall and one in the spring. Staff recommend providing meals and childcare so that parents feel nurtured. For the first 45 minutes of each session, the group eats dinner together and discusses four “ritual questions:” 1) Describe one thing you did this past week to take care of yourself and how it affected your parenting; 2) Describe one positive interaction you had with someone this week; 3) Describe a situation you handled well this week and are proud of; and 4) Describe a situation you wish you had handled differently. Following dinner, there is a learning activity and discussion.

The Parenting Journey originated in Somerville, MA and is based on the family systems principle that no individual exists in isolation. Rifle Middle School staff emphasize the importance of spending the money on sending staff to Boston, MA to attend the weeklong facilitator training—they believe beginning with trained facilitators is critical to the success of The Parenting Journey. This was the largest expense associated with the program.

By helping parents take care of themselves, they feel better equipped to take care of the needs of their children. Parents who have participated in The Parenting Journey at Rifle Middle School share that they feel more positively about the school and more connected to the school. Additionally, they expressed feeling more confident in themselves and that they are not alone in parenting.