

THE PARENT-CHILD MOTHER GOOSE PROGRAM

Glenna Janzen, Director, Parent-Child Mother Goose Program

Since the mid '80s the Parent-Child Mother Goose Program (P-CMGP) has been teaching parents to share the pleasure of oral rhymes, songs and stories together with their little children. While the parents are using rhyming repetitive language accompanied by gentle touch and eye contact, they are strengthening the parent-child bond, establishing positive patterns of relationship that affect the whole family, developing a love of language, and providing the essential foundation for later print literacy.

From one program to many programs...

The Parent-Child Mother Goose Program began with one program in Toronto — the brainchild of a psychologist, a social worker and a storyteller. That original program was joined by three other direct-service, or “core” programs. By the mid '90s, workers in a variety of agencies and organizations were asking how they could implement the Parent-Child Mother Goose Program in their own communities. Celia Lottridge, then executive director of the P-CMGP, developed and began facilitating teacher training workshops that presented the principles, methods, and materials of the program. Some people traveled to Toronto for training, and others asked the P-CMGP office to send a teacher training workshop facilitator to train workers in their own communities. There are now associate Parent-Child Mother Goose Programs in diverse communities across Canada and beyond, including francophone, First Nations, Chinese, Tamil, teenage, multicultural, rural and urban.

The moon is round, as round can be
Two eyes, a nose and a mouth, like me!

Every week, parents and small children in hundreds of Parent-Child Mother Goose Programs across Canada look into each other's eyes and smile as the parent says this rhyme, and touches her or his child gently. The very first time the rhyme is done, the child may wriggle as the parent draws the moon on the child's face, and the parent may be paying more attention to the teacher's actions than to the child. But as the rhyme is repeated that week and in future weeks, both parent and child soon pay full attention to each other, and evolve a pattern of response that makes this rhyme their very own. Perhaps there is a hug at the end of the rhyme, or perhaps when the rhyme is repeated for the second time, as all rhymes are in the Parent-Child Mother Goose Program, the parent uses the child's hand to draw the moon on the parent's face. Later, at home, the parent may use the same rhyme to ease the task of washing the child's face, or to calm and focus a fussy or distracted child.



Through this “useful rhymes for awkward times” strategy, parents learn rhymes and songs that provide a tool-kit of positive parenting strategies.

Leg over leg, the dog went to Dover
When she came to a stile —
Whoops — she went over!

This short rhyme has everything a story needs: a beginning, a middle, and an exciting climax. When the actions are added, it is even more exciting, and soon the child anticipates the whoops and the accompanying leg lift. And that moment when the child's legs are in the air provides the perfect opportunity to slide in a fresh diaper!

Do parents use the Parent-Child Mother Goose rhymes at home? Results from recent research in a number of Toronto programs (2000-2001) facilitated by Dianne Rogers and conducted by Karen Kidder of the Canadian Institute of Child Health found that 83% of respondents did use Parent-Child Mother Goose rhymes and songs with their children “very often” or “often.” The features of the Parent-Child Mother Goose Program that participating parents most often reported valuing were:

- Learning rhymes, songs & stories
- Breaking isolation and socializing with others
- Learning more activities to do with children
- Learning parenting strategies that incorporate rhymes, songs & stories
- Being made welcome in a supportive environment
- Empowering children, verbal and pre-verbal, to communicate

These features, valued by parents in P-CMG programs, correlate well with the objectives of the Parent-Child Mother Goose Program. Establishing a supportive environment and a place for socializing with other parents, and providing (and modeling) a nutritious snack help to create a comfortable space where learning rhymes, songs and stories can happen. To make it possible for all parents to attend, P-CMG programs are free of charge to participants, and many programs provide public transit tickets.

I see the moon, and the moon sees me
Down through the leaves of the old oak tree
Please let the moon that shines on me
Shine on the ones I love.

When this lullaby is sung, a magical thing happens: parents and grandparents and caregivers make themselves more comfortable on the floor, babies snuggle into shoulders, and toddlers return from their explorations of the room and cuddle close. The room, once noisy with whoops and tickles grows quiet. A few faces grow pensive as participants think of loved ones on the other side of the country or on the other side of the world. The actions and the “la la” verse that follows help those who are new to the program, or whose first language is not English.

Through repetition, this lullaby, as well as the other songs, the stories, and the rhymes, becomes part of a broad resource which parents carry in their heads and hearts, instantly accessible for fun in the best of times, smoothing the awkward times, and comfort in the worst of times.

For information, contact the Parent-Child Mother Goose Program, 416-588-5234, mgoose@web.net.

