

Professional Version
Human Development & Family Life
Web Site Review Form
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Introduction

There are two dimensions that need to be considered in judging the quality of web sites devoted to children and family issues-- information and delivery process. The most important aspect of the web site is the quality of the information. If the information is inaccurate and taken from biased or unreliable sources, then no amount of cleverness in delivery can make up for this problem.

Determining the quality of information is a difficult and complex process, nevertheless, for professionals who are developing web sites it is important for them to develop critical evaluation skills as they review other web sites for possible links to their own work and as they make recommendations to other sources of information. At present web site developers have yet to establish professional standards and conventions to document the sources of their information and the necessary standards to ethically present credible information. In many cases the conventional ethical standards that govern teaching family life and conducting clinical work still apply (See Brock, 1993 for example), but the brevity and anonymity of web site programming pose significant challenges. In the face of these circumstances, I am going to offer the following initial suggestions for the necessary standards for developing sound practice in family life education on the World Wide Web. Some of this work is based on guidelines for family life education developed by Hughes (1994). In general, there are four aspects of the website to consider: the author, the author's institution, the content and the delivery process.

Credentials of the Author/Developer

The credentials of the author of the family life content and/or developer of the web site should be plainly available to anyone who visits this site. These credentials at a minimum should include the author's educational background, training, and work experience related to human development and family life issues. It might also include certification or licensure in various professional groups. In these instances there should be direct links (or address/telephone numbers) to the credentialing organization so that web site visitors can verify information claimed by the author/developer.

This is important even if the web site developer is, for example, a grandmother with 30 years experience raising her own children and grandchildren. This value in providing this information is that it provides the reader with the opportunity to decide about the

credibility of the source. Different viewers will have different standards for deciding credibility.

Here are the questions to ask:

1. Does the web site provide information about the author/developer?
2. Who is the author? Experienced parent/grandparent? Professional? What type?
3. Does the web site provide information about the education and/or training of the author/developer?
4. Is the education and/or training related to children, youth and/or families?
5. Does the web site provide information about work and/or teaching experience of the author/developer?
6. How many years experience does the person have in the field of human development and family life, education, social work, psychology, or other human service fields?
7. Does the web site provide information about certification and/or licencing?

Many professional groups are certified or licenced by professional associations. Here are some examples:

Social Workers	National
Association of Social Workers	
Psychologists	American
Psychological Association	
Psychiatrists	American
Psychiatric Association	
Teachers/Education	State (Ohio, etc.)
Education Agency	
Family Life Educators	
National Council on Family Relations	
Family and Consumer Science	
(formerly Home Economists)	American
Association of Family and Consumer Science	

(Most states also have state licencing groups that provide oversight and information about professionals that practice in that state.)

Document the Institutional Affiliation of the Author/Developer

It is also important to know who the sponsoring organization of the web site is. Web sites can be sponsored by educational institutions, professional associations, other professional organizations, private individuals and many others. In part, we need to be clear about who the sponsoring organization really is. If a site claims it is at an educational institutions, universities should have "edu" in the URL, public schools often have "K-12" in their name. To verify that an organization is who it says it is there should be links to

other aspects of the institution or organization. There should be names, addresses, and telephone numbers. In general, educational institutions, professional associations, and organizations and professionals who have a long record of service will most likely provide the reliable and valid information. Here are some questions to consider regarding the sponsoring organizations.

1. Is a sponsoring organization identified. Is it clear what type of institution it is? Educational, clinic, professional association, private agency, home-based human service provider, etc.

2. Is there a link to the organization's web site?

3. Is contact information provided that provides a way to verify the source-- physical address, telephone numbers, etc?

Document the Source of the Information

The author/developer should provide clear information about the source of the information provided at the web site. This might be an overall description for the site in general, but it often may be tied to each document/page/activity on the web site. The source of information could be based on the author's own experience with children, from popular press books, from a variety of practical resources, based on teaching or clinical experience with families or from scientific research. Obviously, in many cases there will be multiple sources. As much as possible the various information in the web site should document the sources of the information. Where appropriate and possible, sources should be closely attached to the specific information.

The following questions could be used as a guide for this area.

1. Is there an overall statement regarding the source(s) of the information contained in the web site?

2. What is the basis for information and advice offered in each document/activity?

3. How convenient/visible is the source of the content? That is, would it be easy for consumers to know the source of the information?

Scientific Information. Although our scientific understanding of human development and family life is still limited, over the course of the last 100 years we have made significant progress in understanding human experience. Scientific information is not an infallible source of advice, however, there is much we know that should not be ignored in our attempts to improve the lives of children and families.

Web developers interested in developing high quality resources related to children and families must incorporate scientific information regarding these issues. There is also important clinical and practical knowledge that has been developed by experienced

teachers and clinicians that must not be ignored in providing information. The following form can be used to rate the extent to which a web site has used research and practice knowledge to develop the information for others. For a more complete description of the items on this form see Hughes (1994).

Please consider the extent to which the information at the web site is based on the considerations.

Content: Theory and Research		Low/Poor			
High/Excellent					
1.	Prevention/intervention theory is clearly stated.	1	2	3	4
2.	Resource is based on current research findings.	1	2	3	4
3.	Resource includes the major and/or most important research sources.	1	2	3	4
4.	Resource accurately uses the findings from research (or other sources).	1	2	3	4
5.	Resource clearly presents the findings from research and other sources.	1	2	3	4
6.	Resource draws appropriate implications from the research and other sources.	1	2	3	4
7.	Resource notes limitations of research findings and conclusions.	1	2	3	4
Content: Context					
8.	Contextual information regarding the families involvement in relevant settings (school, work, child care, church) is appropriately considered.	1	2	3	4
9.	Culture and social class influences are appropriately considered.	1	2	3	4
10.	Political, economic and other macrosocial influences are appropriately considered.	1	2	3	4
		Low/Poor		High/Excellent	
Content: Practice					
11.	Resource adds something new to the				

	practice/intervention approaches on this topic/issue.	1	2	3	4
12.	Resource builds on appropriate existing program resources (e.g., other programs, professionals, clinical research).	1	2	3	4
13.	Resource accurately uses finding from clinical research/practice.	1	2	3	4
14.	Teaching/Intervention strategies and techniques are based on clinical research/practice.	1	2	3	4
15.	Resource notes current limitation of clinical/practice knowledge in regards to this program/topic.	1	2	3	4

Instructional Process In addition to the content a good web site will also attend to the ways in which people learn about the information. We are probably a long way from knowing how to teach effectively on web sites, but here are some issues that might be considered. These reflect my biases regarding the importance of "interactive" processes in teaching through electronic technology. Please rate the web site on the following dimensions related to teaching and presentation of the information.

Teaching Plans		Low/Poor			Hig
1.	The topic is important for the intended audience.	1	2	3	4
2.	There are clear objectives for the interactive/teaching elements in the web site.	1	2	3	4

		Low/Poor			Hig
3.	Activities/ interactive features fit the objectives.	1	2	3	4
4.	Activities/ interactive features are appropriate for the intended audience(s); (age group, family type, gender, ethnic group).	1	2	3	4
5.	Directions for learning/ interactive features are sufficient.	1	2	3	4
6.	A variety of activities and/or formats are used.	1	2	3	4
7.	Balance between information, discussion, and learning activities is achieved.	1	2	3	4
8.	Structured and/or unstructured approaches are used appropriately.	1	2	3	4
9.	Appropriate and useful feedback is provided to participants in regard to the learning/interactive features.	1	2	3	4
10.	The structure of the content is logically organized and easy to follow.	1	2	3	4
11.	Potential problems/ limitations are discussed and solutions suggested.				
1	2	3	4	5	

Presentation

12.	Readability is appropriate for the intended audience.	1	2	3	4
13.	Appropriateness of the examples for the intended audience.	1	2	3	4
14.	Attractiveness of the resource for the intended audience.	1	2	3	4

		Low/Poor		High/Excellent	
15.	Appropriate portrayal of a range of racial/ethnic groups.	1	2	3	4
16.	Appropriate portrayal of a range of family types.	1	2	3	4
17.	Effectiveness of pictures/graphs, etc.	1	2	3	4
18.	Quality of the overall design and layout.	1	2	3	4

References

Brock, G. W. (1993). Ethical guidelines for the practice of family life education. *Family Relations*, 42, 124-127.

Hughes, Jr., R. (1994). A framework for developing family life education programs. *Family Relations*, 43, 74-80.