

ELTERN TALK gets parents talking to each other

An activity organised as part of the Aktion Jugendschutz, Landesarbeitsstelle Bayern e.V. (Bavarian Initiative for the Protection of Adolescents)



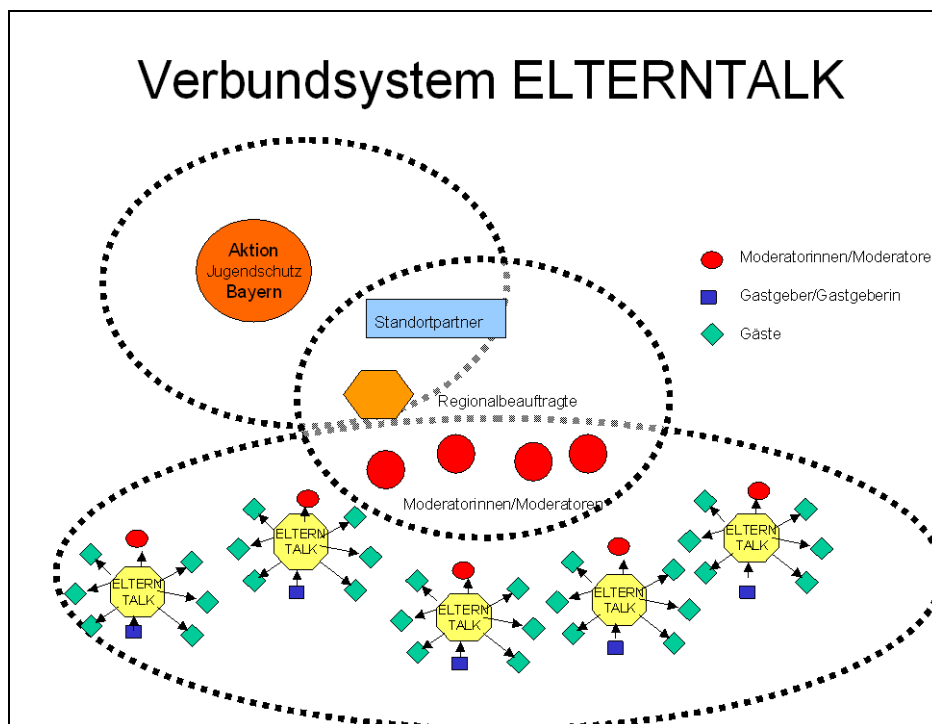
ELTERN TALK organises group discussion sessions for parents in a private setting. ELTERN TALK discussion sessions explore topics focusing on issues such as the media, consumption, addiction prevention and education. The sessions explore a wide range of questions raised by the parents, for example: “What is important to me in the area of media education?”, “Do the media promote violence?”, “How do other parents handle the issue of television?”, “Computers in children’s bedrooms – yes or no?”, “How much pocket money should I give my children?”, “What is important to me in relation to spending and consumption?”, “The Internet and computer games are a constant source of conflict for us. What should I do?”, “At what age should I give my child a mobile phone, and what do I need to look out for?”, “How can I protect my child against alcohol and drugs, and give him/her the strength to resist them?”. Group discussions and an open exchange of experience encourage parents to find and adopt approaches to media use, consumer behaviour and addiction prevention that foster their children’s development.

ELTERN TALK promotes communication between parents and their children, and supports them in the management of their everyday relationships and in the resolution of conflicts between them. By providing inspiration on issues related to child-rearing, ELTERN TALK encourages parents to become aware of their own educational skills and promotes local parenting networks. The location of the discussion sessions in private residences means that the project can reach target groups that tend to be reticent about becoming involved in institutional forms of parenting education.

ELTERN TALK – a system of multipliers forming a Bavaria-wide network

ELTERN TALK is suitable for both urban and rural contexts. For this reason, the Aktion Jugendschutz, Landesarbeitsstelle Bayern e.V. (AJ) places particular emphasis on close cooperation with various organisations, services and institutions at both regional and *Land* (federal state) level.

The following diagram illustrates ELTERN TALK’s system of multipliers



Verbundsystem ELTERNTALK = The ELTERNTALK Network

Standortpartner = Local partners

Regionalbeauftragte = Regional representatives

Moderatorinnen/Moderatoren = Facilitators

Gastgeber/Gastgeberin = Host

Gäste = Guests

Based on the service it provides, ELTERNTALK breaks new ground in the area of cooperation with parents. The aim is to create as extensive a network as possible of ELTERNTALK locations throughout Bavaria, which provide these discussion sessions (for example, based on the existing urban and rural administrative divisions).

ELTERNTALK – parents for parents

ELTERNTALK is a low-threshold parenting education service based on the everyday lives and experience of parents. It has the following objectives:

- ELTERNTALK aims to raise awareness of the influence of media and consumption on conflict resolution, and the management of everyday relationships between children and their parents.
- ELTERNTALK aims to raise parents' awareness of the topic of addiction prevention.
- ELTERNTALK aims to reinforce parents' own educational skills, in particular in the areas of media use, consumer behaviour, healthy child-rearing and addiction prevention.
- ELTERNTALK aims to enable the exploration of these issues through facilitated discussions between parents. The focus here is on the exchange of experience, mutual information and consultation.

ELTERNTALK target groups

- ELTERNTALK is primarily aimed at parents with children up to 14 years of age.
- ELTERNTALK aims to reach parents with migration backgrounds, in particular, and parents in exceptional and/or stressful situations.

Profile

A host or hostess invites parents to his or her home. A facilitator, who is also a parent, introduces the topic for discussion with the help of an introductory medium and facilitates the

subsequent discussion. An open exchange of experience encourages the parents to broach current child-rearing issues that arise within the family context and to find solutions that are practical and reflect the conditions of everyday life.

One of the facilitators' crucial tasks is to establish an open atmosphere for the discussion and get things going with a motivating start to the process. The discussions focus on various aspects of the topics relevant to child-rearing, e.g. media, consumer behaviour and addiction prevention. The discussion sessions, which last approximately two hours, give the parents the space and time to exchange information, unburden themselves, learn from each other or simply listen. **The spotlight in these "expert discussions" is on the exchange of experience. The parents are the protagonists; they are the "experts in their own child-rearing experience".** The facilitator supports the discussion. He/she presents questions to the circle of parents, encourages them to report on their own personal experience, summarises the results and ensures that the discussion remains on track. If additional questions and problems emerge in the course of a discussion, the facilitators can provide feedback to the local partner/regional representative and act as a mediating force.

Mothers and fathers are prepared for their task as facilitators by the regional representatives. The facilitators look for potential hosts for the facilitated discussion sessions in private settings, that is the ELTERNTALKs. Based on the snowball effect, guests become new hosts by inviting parents from their circles of friends and acquaintances to another ELTERNTALK session. This principle is based on an **attitude that values** the parents and their practical knowledge of child-rearing.

ELTERNTALK promotes mutual respect and tolerance and makes it possible for parents to become familiar with different attitudes on a range of topics relating to child-rearing. **Empowerment** and **open dialogue** enable and create space for communication by helping the participants to develop their own views and options for action, without being instructed.

This **low-threshold approach, which is based on everyday life and experience**, strengthens the parents and their communications networks and promotes social life in the corresponding milieus.

Aktion Jugendschutz – the ELTERNTALK Section

The entire management of the project (conception, development, coordination and evaluation) is the responsibility of the ELTERNTALK Section of the Aktion Jugendschutz, Landesarbeitsstelle Bayern e.V. The consultants at the ELTERNTALK Section also produce the introductory modules and material for the ELTERNTALKs, as well as training material for the regional representatives and facilitators. The ongoing training and expert support of the regional representatives is a further task carried out by the Section. Another important aspect of the Section's work is the development and maintenance of a cooperation and communication network at *Land* level. The Section avails of existing committee structures for this purpose. It also makes use of the media, in particular the Internet, for public relations purposes.

Local partners

Cooperation and networking with other organisations, services and institutions is practical and desirable at both *Land* level and especially at local level. Depending on the situation and starting position, the following groups and organisations are particularly worthy of consideration as local ELTERNTALK partners:

- Youth welfare offices
- Charitable organisations with their sub-divisions and associated institutions
- Catholic and Protestant parishes
- Free and public family education providers
- Parent and family groups, women's groups
- Mothers'/fathers' centres, family centres
- Counselling and information centres for individuals with migration background
- Health authorities

- Addiction counselling centres

The local partners receive support and counselling from the ELTERNTALK Section in regional public relations. As part of project-funding, Aktion Jugendschutz is currently in a position to pay a contribution towards the local partners' running costs.

Regional representatives

The regional representatives are familiar with the structure of youth services in their regions and also have specialised educational knowledge and training. They work closely with the local partners in their region and make use of these partners' resources.

- The ELTERNTALK target groups are reached by means of targeted contact. Involvement and cooperative exchange with institutions that work directly with these families and are familiar with their situations is important here.

Experience and perspectives

To date, over 21,000 parents in Bavaria have participated in ELTERNTALK discussion sessions. Twenty-six regional leaders can currently provide ELTERNTALK services in 19 regions in Bavaria. The discussions mainly take place in German, Turkish and Russian. All locations and their regional contacts are listed on the ELTERNTALK website: **www.elterntalk.net**.

Thanks to the continuous evaluation that has been carried out since the project's pilot phase in October 2001, it is possible to discern how ELTERNTALK will spread and develop. The ongoing evaluation and accompanying scientific research in 2004 confirm that ELTERNTALK is successful in reaching parents from different educational and cultural backgrounds. One of the strengths of ELTERNTALK is the ease of participation for all parents - a feature that is both targeted and facilitated by the procedural structure. Making it possible to learn in an enjoyable way and providing a relaxed atmosphere are essential to the success of these discussions between parents.

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