

# Parents, adult children learn to communicate again

By Louise Okrusky  
staff writer

Geography and ambition drove a wedge between Florentina Rimal and her adult children. "There hadn't been any loud arguments or unpleasant scenes to mar the relationship. Her family was scattered among three states. Her children were adults preoccupied with their own lives. "When my children finished school, I knew that in spite of the distance we'd be very close," Rimal said. "After eight years, I started thinking we weren't communicating in the same way." One day, an acquaintance mentioned that she, too, struggled to keep her family close to her. "She said, 'I'm an orphaned parent.' She started crying. Never had a

name seemed so appropriate," Rimal said. Realizing she wasn't the only one trying to stay close to a far flung family, Rimal began organizing "Orphaned Parents' workshops under the auspices of the Birmingham Temple in Farmington Hills. The next one's scheduled for 9 a.m. to 5:30 p.m. Sunday, Nov. 10, in the Birmingham Temple, 2811 West 13 Mile between Inlander and Middlebelt, Farmington Hills. The \$20 fee includes lunch and workshop materials. For details and to make reservations call Sheila Bass at 626-3812 or Sandy Altman at 651-1518. "I always felt it was a personal problem," Rimal said. After fielding phone calls about the workshops from as far away as New Orleans and California, she's come to consider her problem a phase of modern

life. For a fee the "Orphaned Parents' task force will help other groups organize similar workshops. "This is something that happened continually," said Sheila Bass, an "Orphaned Parents' task force member. "Early immigrants and even our generation left their parents and the parents didn't think of it. "I probably did the same thing," said Rimal, who left her own family in Brazil to emigrate to this country. "We weren't going back to Brazil. They had less of a chance to meet their grandchildren than I did." "Previous generations of parents were more accepting," Bass said. "Now, we try to do something about it." In other generations, most families retained a core of members who stayed near to each other. That resource is denied to many nowadays. "This is a lonely society," said Rimal.

Between careers and housekeeping duties, people don't have time to know their neighbors. In some ways, parents are victims of their own success, according to Rimal. As their children grew, they were encouraged to pursue high powered professional careers. Now, as adults, they're caught up in maintaining careers that have taken them far from their childhood homes. Their lifestyle's left them little time to keep in touch with their parents. While the first workshop focused on getting people to put into words how it felt to be an orphaned parent, it also uncovered another side of the problem. Adult children felt uneasy about confiding in their parents and perhaps adding to their problems. Now, workshops focus also on children who feel they can't communicate frankly with their parents. In the beginning the workshops also uncovered resentment from children whose parents considered themselves orphaned. "The children thought it was very offensive," Rimal said. One of her daughters, Monica Rimal, expressed her reaction to the workshops in an essay used in the "Orphaned Parents' handbook. "When I first heard the term (orphaned parents), it grated against my nerves like the sound of finger nails running across a chalk board. I felt it ignored my side of the story, the countless telephone calls in which my parents said little while their anger came through loud and clear; the enormous amount of almost paralyzing guilt I felt over behaviour that I did not consider malicious or even within my control," Rimal's daughter wrote last year. "People think that it's only happened to them. They long to communicate with children without getting into a guilt trip," Rimal said. "This is life." The workshops are designed to cut through the guilt on both sides. Participants are encouraged to begin building new relationships with their family. "This is not a bereavement group," Rimal said. "We have to face something and solve it in a positive way. We work to improve communication."



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— Florentina Rimal  
Founder, 'Orphaned Parents' task force

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