

# Podcasts as Programming

## Reaching Busy Parents on Their Time

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During a two-year post-pandemic period (2021 to 2023), the Youth Services Department at the Patchogue-Medford Library in Suffolk County, NY, hosted fourteen parental education programs, both in-person and virtually. Despite offering evening sessions and partnering with the local school district, attendance averaged just five parents per program, and it became clear that the library's efforts were not meeting the modern parenting moment.

As a working parent, I understood that while parents still needed library-sponsored parental education, conventional library programming wasn't working with their packed schedules. To try and reach this busy and subsequently underserved audience, I created the "podcasts as programming" initiative and its first series, *Adventures in Parenting*, designed to deliver valuable educational content to parents in an on-demand format.

The timing for this shift to podcast programming for parents was right. A 2023 Pew Research Study showed 58% of adults ages 30 to 49 were already consuming podcasts, and the pandemic had increased overall digital literacy.<sup>1</sup> By moving parenting resources to a familiar, on-demand audio format, the library could finally connect its valuable educational content with its community. The podcast allowed us to reach parents where they were, when they had the time to listen.

The initiative took shape through three key steps. First, I partnered with reference librarian Erin Clark, who brought both audio engineering experience and a shared perspective as a fellow working mom. Next came the technical setup, which started modestly with recordings taking place in a storage closet before eventually moving into a dedicated studio space.

The final and most crucial step was defining the podcast's true purpose. After an early episode on summer reading fell flat, we

realized we needed to shift from thinking like librarians to thinking like parents. Once we began crafting content around the real pressing needs of their parent community, the ideas began flowing naturally through daily conversations with patrons.

The monthly podcast format has maintained many traditional program planning procedures. Episode topics emerged organically in two ways, either from direct community requests, like a back-to-school organization episode, or through partnerships with local organizations, such as an online safety episode.

The team also taps into an often-overlooked resource: the diverse expertise of library staff themselves. From gaming specialists to digital literacy experts, in-house talent provides valuable content while highlighting the library's internal resources. And just like traditional programming, the team works to maintain seasonal relevance for their episodes, timing topics like "Screen Time and Online Wellbeing" for December when families receive new devices, but now delivers this content when and where parents can access it.

While the initiative initially followed traditional programming procedures including contracts, hourly rates, and invoices, it evolved into a more flexible and cost-effective model that maintained familiar planning elements. Without the need to coordinate



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around room availability or patron schedules, experts can record at times that work best for them, including morning sessions that would be impractical for in-person events. Recording length is similarly flexible; when their financial literacy expert had more to share, we simply split the content into two episodes.

To ensure each episode delivers maximum value, we create detailed outlines to guide conversations with experts. These outlines, shared with guests before recording, help keep discussions focused while ensuring all crucial information is covered. This collaborative approach allows experts to provide input while maintaining the episode's educational goals, much like the preparation for traditional library programming but adapted for the podcast format.

The benefits of this podcasting approach have been significant. Unlike traditional lectures, the conversational format engages listeners more effectively, with the podcasters acting as surrogates for their audience rather than positioning themselves as experts. The initiative has expanded the library's reach, allowing them to feature both local community organizations and national experts like the national trade group The Toy Association, a partnership that might have been impractical or too expensive in a traditional setting. The format also enables quick responses to community needs. When invited to speak about teen mental health resources at a middle school parent-teacher association (PTA) meeting, we quickly produced an episode with a local youth mental health organization rather than waiting to organize an in-person event. We then promoted that episode to the PTA as an additional resource on the topic.

Most importantly, the on-demand access means parents can engage with content when and where it works for them, whether that is while doing household chores or waiting at soccer practice, and access information precisely when they need it in their parenting journey.

## The Logistics

We have developed efficient production practices to maintain quality and focus. Episodes are kept to thirty to forty-five minutes, skipping typical podcast banter to respect the audience's time constraints. We maintain a structured approach to recording, with co-hosts pre-assigning questions to ensure comprehensive coverage while preserving a natural conversational flow.

For editing, we use Audacity, minimizing post-production work through careful preparation and clear guidelines for guests about personal information sharing. The podcast is hosted on Podbean, which provides both user-friendly publishing tools and valuable analytics—showing that 47% of listeners access episodes via browser downloads and 26% through Apple Podcasts. This data helps us refine our approach to better serve the parent community.

Each episode is supported by carefully crafted supplementary materials and promotion. Resource guides—mirroring traditional



in-person program handouts—list authoritative, free, and local resources mentioned during recording, with additional research conducted by staff to provide deeper exploration opportunities. Promotion leverages multiple channels with engaging episode descriptions, social media promotion featuring action-oriented highlights, and direct community outreach.

We distribute QR-coded flyers at PTA events and children's programs, using LinkTree to connect parents directly to relevant content. This comprehensive approach ensures that valuable parenting resources reach their audience effectively, whether through listening or through self-guided learning using the online resource guides.

The initiative's success is clear in the numbers. Since launching in June 2023, *Adventures in Parenting* has released 21 episodes, garnering 758 total downloads, which breaks down to 522 episode downloads and 276 resource guide downloads. This averages 24 listeners per episode, representing a 600% increase over previous in-person attendance.

Popular episodes cover diverse topics critical to modern parenting, from "The Importance of Play" (forty-six downloads) to "Screen Time and Online Well-Being" (thirty-five downloads) and "Teen Mental Health" (thirty-four downloads). Importantly, episodes continue to accumulate downloads over time, demonstrating the enduring value of this on-demand format for busy parents seeking reliable parenting guidance.

Looking ahead, we hope to expand our reach through partnerships with local parent groups, school administrators, and teachers. They are also exploring ways to involve community parents and children in the podcast while maintaining its educational focus. The success of *Adventures in Parenting* has opened possibilities for reaching other underserved populations within the community, including the Hispanic population and young adults. The podcast-as-programming model offers a promising template for connecting with diverse audiences who might not otherwise engage with traditional library services. &

## Reference

1. "Podcasts as a Source of News and Information," Pew Research Center, April 18, 2023, <https://www.pewresearch.org/journalism/2023/04/18/podcasts-as-a-source-of-news-and-information/>.