



Child Development and Parenting Education

Situation:

Teen substance abuse, delinquency, increased drop out rates, and other high risk behaviors concern Belknap County residents just as they do people throughout the country. Research shows, however, that when we increase positive, age-appropriate experiences in childhood, and support healthy adult/child relationships, we decrease the risks that children will engage in a variety of high risk behaviors as they move into adulthood. There is a need for high quality, evidence-based resources and education for parents and other caregivers to increase positive opportunities for the youth of Belknap County.

UNH Cooperative Extension's Response:

Family and Consumer Resources (FCR) Child Development programs focus on providing adult caregivers and role models with the knowledge and skills needed to enhance the experiences and relationships of children. Information and training is provided in a variety of formats, including single workshops, series and publications.

- Educational program topics include:
 - understanding the stages of development and how the environment impacts growth in all areas,
 - developing positive communication and discipline strategies,
 - reducing stress, and
 - improving conflict resolution strategies.
- In 2008, 85 adults in Belknap County attended seven Better Kid Care programs. These trainings, offered through satellite and video, and facilitated locally with face-to-face teaching, are designed for child care professionals to learn more about planning and implementing high quality child care programs.
- Over 500 additional Belknap County families received the age-paced newsletter series, Cradle Crier and Toddler Tales. Lakes Region General Hospital and other local agencies working with new parents sign them up for these educational fact sheets. UNH Cooperative Extension continues to distribute each developmentally focused newsletter to families through their children's second year.
- An Extension Specialist recently met with the Gilford and Laconia interdisciplinary school safety team to assist in the development of ongoing school safety issues in area schools. An in-service training for all district personnel is planned for the fall of 2009.
- Ongoing support and consultation are provided to the parent resource center at Laconia men's prison. We currently assist in designing curriculum that will strengthen the program's ability to assist prisoners to successfully reintegrate into their families and reduce the high likelihood they will abuse or neglect their children.

How We Made a Difference:

- One hundred fifty-seven parents, child care providers, and other caregivers directly participated in workshops and series. Through evaluation, caregivers demonstrated an increased understanding and use of positive discipline strategies, developmentally-based expectations, use of natural and logical consequences and increased ability to manage stress.
- Through collaboration with local coalitions such as Upstream, UNH Cooperative Extension continues to work to increase the capacity of other organizations and individuals throughout the region to provide quality, evidence-based information and resources to families.
 - The Upstream coalition consists of many local and state resource agencies working together to provide parenting and child development opportunities as well as professional development and resource-building within the community.
 - Through the coalition, we are able to coordinate information and maximize limited resources. We are currently working to develop innovative ways of sharing resources such as a resource/curriculum library and development of new programs to address emerging needs.
 - UNH Cooperative Extension, as the county partner to Upstream, put 23 of county-based agencies and organizations in touch with UNH research, faculty and resources.