



## **Child Development and Parenting Education**

### **Situation:**

Strong families raise children to become responsible, productive, caring adults. But sometimes parents, with diverse strengths and weaknesses, need education to help them become even better parents. They also worry about finding childcare or interacting with childcare providers. In 2003, one in five New Hampshire children lived in families headed by a single parent, and 22 percent of children lived in low-income families. That same year, more than 12,000 New Hampshire children lived in extreme poverty, and 7,000 children lived in a household where no adult had worked in the past 12 months. When these risk factors combine with a lack of child development knowledge, children suffer. In the most recent survey taken in New Hampshire, the state substantiated 1,436 cases of child maltreatment. In that same year 1,214 children were in state-sponsored placements because of maltreatment.

### **UNH Cooperative Extension's Public Value:**

Parent education is effective in reducing child abuse and neglect, and saves real dollars by preventing costly social service, justice and mental health system intervention. As well, healthy families are more productive in the workforce, contribute positively to their communities, and raise children who perform better in school. These children are less likely to get into trouble later, which might lead them into the juvenile justice system, and families are less likely to need further state and federally-funded services.

### **UNH Cooperative Extension's Response:**

Extension's Family and Consumer Resources Child Development programs focus on providing parents, adult caregivers, and childcare professionals information and skills needed to enhance their experiences and relationships with children. Extension provides research-based information and training in a variety of formats, including single workshops, series and publications.

- Educational program topics include:
  - Understanding the stages of child development and how the environment affects growth in all areas.
  - Developing positive communication and discipline strategies.
  - Reducing stress, and
  - Improving conflict resolution strategies.
- Sharon Cowen and Thom Linehan, Extension Educators, Family and Consumer Resources in Hillsborough County, collaborate with several organizations and agencies to provide parenting education programs and consultation. As an example, ...
  - In 2008, 32 early childhood professionals and childcare workers from Amherst and Nashua attended three programs designed to learn more about planning and implementing high quality childcare and preschool programs.
  - Almost 300 parents from Hillsborough County attended parent education workshop series. Thirteen Head Start parents attended a workshop on parenting children with challenging behaviors. Participants in parenting education classes included court-ordered individuals referred to parent education classes because of child abuse and neglect or custody issues. Division of Children, Youth and Families, the Family Court Judge, and Probation continued to refer people to parenting education programs.
  - More than 3,400 additional Hillsborough County families received the age-paced newsletter series, "Cradle Crier" and "Toddler Tales." The information they received helped them be better prepared to meet their infant or toddler needs and stimulate their growth and development. Registration is primarily through forms picked up at local hospitals and WIC (Women with Infants and Children). UNH Cooperative Extension continues to distribute each developmentally focused newsletter to families on a monthly basis through their children's second year.
  - Parenting classes are also offered to inmates at the New Hampshire State Prison for Women and Valley Street Jail and to the participants in Manchester and Nashua Academy Programs, an alternative sentencing program that requires participants to take life-skills classes.

- Training in parenting education was provided to home visiting staff of New Hampshire Minority Health Coalition, and workshops on social and emotional development and child development were offered to parents at middle schools in Nashua, Amherst, and Milford.

### **How We Make a Difference:**

- Of the parenting education participants completing evaluations, self-reported behavior changes included being more patient with their children, using more positive parenting practices, and having age-appropriate expectations for their children.
- Many reported learning new information and specific practices in their childcare settings to increase the quality of their care. This is an important professional development opportunity for childcare providers for documenting training hours to meet New Hampshire licensing requirements.
- Parents who participate in parenting classes ultimately use their new parenting knowledge and skills. Statistically, children in these families have better social/emotional skills, better academic success, and less chance for neglect/abuse in these homes. This affects the children directly, their families, the schools, neighborhoods, and ultimately the entire community and state.

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