



## **Child Development and Parenting Education**

### **Situation:**

Strong families raise children to become responsible, productive and caring adults. Parents, from diverse backgrounds and with diverse strengths and weaknesses, sometimes need education to help them become effective parents. Parents often 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. In 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 are combined with a lack of child development knowledge, children can suffer. In the most recent survey taken in New Hampshire, the state substantiated 1,436 cases of child maltreatment. In that the same year 1,214 children were in state-sponsored placements because of maltreatment.

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

Family and Consumer Resources (FCR) Child Development programs focus on providing parents, adult caregivers, and childcare professionals with the information and skills needed to enhance the experiences and relationships of 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.
  - improving conflict resolution strategies.
- Ellen Rondina, Extension Educator in Family and Consumer Resources in Strafford County, collaborates with several organizations and agencies to provide parenting education programs and consultation. As an example, she works with the HUB Family Resource Center as a consultant, and also provides a “grandparents and other relatives who are parenting someone else’s children” group and facilitates “Parenting During Difficult Circumstances” yearly.
- In 2008, Strafford County childcare workers attended four Better Kid Care programs designed for childcare professionals to learn more about planning and implementing high quality childcare programs. These trainings were offered through satellite and video and facilitated locally with face-to-face teaching.
- Ellen collaborates with Strafford County’s Family Resource Center to offer a Reflective Practice Group to parent educators, as a professional development opportunity. Many organizations offer parenting education, but their professionals often consult with Extension educators to ensure the information they provide is accurate and up-to-date.
- More than 1,000 additional Strafford County families received the age-paced newsletter series, “Cradle Crier” and “Toddler Tales”. Wentworth Douglass 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 on a monthly basis through their children’s second year.
- Parenting classes are also offered to inmates at the Strafford County jail and to the participants in the Academy program, an alternative sentencing program that requires participants to take life-skills classes.

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

- More than 80 percent of participants in childcare workshops reported their intent to use specific practices learned from the workshops in their childcare settings to increase the quality of their care.
- 100 percent of participants reported learning new skills such as “taking more time to listen and comprehend what behaviors are and how to deal”, “not making quick judgments”, “finding alternatives to getting the best response from the boys”, “stopping and thinking before I get upset over something when I’m stressed”, “positive reinforcement methods”, and “using the word “no” less often.”

- Parents who participate in parenting classes ultimately use their new parenting knowledge and skills. Statistically, based on measured knowledge gained and behavior changed, and based on the quality of the programming, children in these families have better social/emotional skills, better academic success, and there will be less chance for neglect/abuse in these homes. This affects the children directly, the families themselves, the schools, neighborhoods, and of course ultimately the entire community and state. These children are less likely to get into trouble later, which might lead them into the juvenile justice system, and the families are less likely to need further state and federally funded services.

**Research shows that:**

- Parent education is effective in reducing child abuse and neglect (Huebner, 2002);
- Family resource centers such as the Family Education Collaborative can reduce community rates of juvenile crime, addiction, and delinquency (Farrington and Welsh, 1999);
- Parent education saves real dollars by preventing costly social service, justice and mental health system intervention (Farrington and Welsh, 1999);
- Healthy families are more productive in the workforce, contribute positively to their communities, and raise children who perform better in school (Brandon & Temple, 2007).

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