

Parenting Education Network

Welcome to the readers of the first issue of the NCPEN newsletter! The theme of this newsletter is Partnership. NCPEN wants to facilitate partnerships between parents and educators, whether these are child care providers, teachers or parent educators. Working together, we can help each child to fulfill his or her own potential. We are the important adults in the lives of children. Let's work together! We welcome your comments and ideas. Please address any correspondence to: NCPEN, Box 7605, NCSU, Raleigh, NC 27695-7605 or visit our website at: www.ncchild.org/ncpen.htm

NCPEN: Who ARE we?

by Susan McClanahan, Parent

How did you learn to be a parent? Like many of us learned? By listening to other parents, reading books, and entering the "school of hard knocks" known as trial and error? There must be a better way to learn about effective parenting strategies.



The North Carolina Parenting Education Network (NCPEN) is a coalition that represents various statewide agencies and parents who believe that parents and teachers have one of the most challenging and rewarding roles in our society; raising healthy children. Many of us at NCPEN are parents ourselves. As such, we feel that those who are raising children deserve support for their best efforts under oftentimes difficult circumstances. We also know that "on-the-job" training can be a very hard way to learn and that parents have much to offer one another.

So much has been learned about parenting and child development in recent years, that NCPEN believes it is time to network to help parents share new ideas and approaches. **NCPEN's mission is to: "facilitate statewide linkages among parents and other partners to encourage positive parenting practices."** The term "partners" is meant to include all of those adults who may play an important role in a child's life (grand-

parents, other kin, single parents, step parents, foster parents, co-parents, teen parents, guardians, teachers and other caregivers). Parent educators are also partners in this process. As a coalition with more than twenty-five representatives that are committed to meaningful and responsive parent education, NCPEN hopes to serve as one centralized planning group for North Carolina. Other states are starting similar networks. There is a parallel national initiative called the National Parenting Education Network (website at <http://npn.crc.uiuc.edu>).

NCPEN Projects

NCPEN members have been working toward many goals in the past year. Two of our members, Henry Helms and Jean Fuller, are on the planning committee for the statewide **Parent/Community Involvement Best Practices Conference** being offered by the NC Department of Public Instruction. We hope that you'll join us at this conference on November 18-19 in Greensboro. (See Upcoming Events for details.) It is important that parent voices be heard at events such as this one.

Thanks to the generosity of the NC Child Advocacy Institute, more information about NCPEN can now be found at the following website: <http://www.ncchild.org/ncpen.htm>.

This newsletter is another one of our goals for this year. Thanks to funding from Ron Moore at the NC Division of Child Development, Head Start funds support this newsletter. NC State's in-kind contribution has been the leadership of Dr. Karen DeBord. We hope that parents and educators will find this newsletter to be a valuable resource.

Building a School-Family Partnership

by Jean Fuller, Communities in Schools of North Carolina

I recently attended a wonderful training that I would like to share with parents, schools, and communities. Known as Families and Schools Together (FAST), the FAST program from Madison, WI, aims to strengthen parent-child relationships, increase parent involvement in schools, prevent youth school failure, inform families about substance abuse, and reduce family stress. The program has shown marked improvement in children's school performance and parental involvement in schools.

If you would like more information about this program, please call me at 919-832-2700.

It's Time for School!

Getting Children of all ages ready for school

by Susan Poorman, MOTHEREAD, Inc. and Val Wilson, Project Enlightenment

What does a child need to be "ready" for school? How can adults nurture school readiness? It's more than the ABC's and the 123's — it is also feeling good about oneself and being able to get along in a group. School readiness also includes children's physical health, self-confidence, and social competence.

There are no magic answers for getting ready. However, the more a child understands and is ready for what will happen, the more positive school will be. Parents, teachers, and community members must be well informed so that they can build a sense of confidence and security for the children in their lives.

What You Can Do:

- Read to your child every day and talk about what you have read. Listen to the child retell and share new stories. It is a fun and nurturing way to improve their attention span and their ability to understand what is said. Sharing books with young children helps them to understand language, and this ease with language is the first step in becoming a reader. Experts say that adults should continue to read



aloud to children even after they can read to themselves.

- Get children ready for the structure of school by providing daily routines for dressing, eating, sleeping, playing, and cleaning up. A regular order of events each day gives children a sense of control over their lives. It also allows them to know what things are going to happen and when.
- Help young children to learn about time. Most young children can measure time by the length of a special TV show. A five-year-old who asks, "How long will it take?" will understand the adult who says, "The same amount of time that 'Reading Rainbow' takes." Older children will need to learn about planning their time to allow enough worktime for long-term projects, and juggling homework with other activities.

- Teach children to take care of themselves. This will help them to feel ready for school. Look for fun ways to help younger children learn such skills as wiping their own noses, opening a milk carton, and putting on their own jacket or sweater. Older children will need to practice getting themselves up in the morning, choosing clothes and getting dressed, helping to make lunch or snack, and packing their book bags. Once children have learned a self-help skill, continue to allow them enough time to practice it.

It is important that all children begin the school year eager to learn and with the belief that they are special and can do well. With the love, support and encouragement of the important adults in their lives, every child can achieve great things!

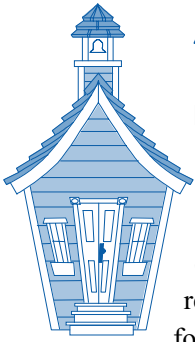
For more information, check out these books:

- *Language Games to Play with your Child*, by Allyssa McCabe.
- *The Read Aloud Handbook* (revised), by Jim Trelease.

Lunch Packables

It can be tiresome to try to pack a lunch that is good and has variety. Here are some ideas to add to the lunchbox:

- ALWAYS keep cold food cold with an icepack!
- Consider using bagels, pita bread and burrito shells instead of sliced bread.
- Preslice oranges, cantaloupe or other fruit.
- Make a quick salad of sliced cucumbers, cherry tomatoes, and salad dressing.



Are You a Parent Educator?

Then pay attention to who's in the learning group!

by Karen DeBord, Child Development Specialist, NC State University Cooperative Extension Service

Parents have long wanted information on child rearing, but the recent surge in requests for formal parenting

education is causing a boom for the profession. This boom presents many questions, one of which concerns the *design of* parenting education. Could the following factors be related to participation and high drop out rates by parents?

- design of programs
- when and where they are held
- how they are taught
- the content delivered

To a large extent, many parenting education programs have been planned based on what a parent educator thinks parents need, rather than being based upon the stated needs and preferences of the parents themselves. Even in 1980 researchers were recommending that parent educators pay attention to the great diversity among families advising that parent education programs should be as diverse as the anticipated population for whom they are designed (Harman & Brim, 1980). The diversity among family type, characteristics and culture just continues to grow nationwide.

To address some of these concerns, the *North Carolina Parenting Education Network* partnered with Dr. Karen DeBord from North Carolina State University - Cooperative Extension, to collect data from North Carolina parents to seek a greater understanding of how parents want to receive parenting information. Preliminary results have been tabulated.

Based on data from a cross sample of 214 parents from various walks of life, parents say that they mainly get their current parenting information from their

- own parents,
- friends, and
- medical practitioners.

However, half of the parents responded that they would prefer to learn about parenting in a group with another parent leading or one-on-one with another parent. When asked who they would most like to learn from in a group, most parents preferred to learn from another parent, but many preferred a trained parent educator. When asked who else should be in a parent learning group, most felt very comfortable with other family members (81%) or good friends (90%).

Nearly half of the respondents (49%) were not comfortable learning with people they do not know. This has several implications for how community educators should design their approach to delivering parenting education. A more detailed analysis will be conducted to review how parental learning preferences differ based on economic status, family type, children's age, parents's age, race or ethnicity.

Reference:

Harman, D., & Brim, O. G., Jr (1980). *Learning to be parents. Principles, programs, and methods.* Beverly Hills, CA: Sage.

How to know when to call your child's teacher

by Karen DeBord, Child Development Specialist, NC Cooperative Extension

Sometimes children give us clues to let us know that something is bothering them. Does your child

- complain about school or say that they are sick and they don't want to go to school?
- whine, cry, or act unusually cranky before school?
- say they have no friends at school or that others make fun of him/her?

Then it might be time to touch base with the teacher. It is also good to tell the teacher when there are changes happening at home. This helps the teacher to know that there is something going on that may distract the child. Send in a short note if:

- you are going out of town for a few days.
- something at home changes, whether it's a birth or a death in the family, a separation, or any other stressor.
- your child was up late or seems to be getting sick.

You are your child's best spokesperson.

Sometimes children and teens don't really know themselves what is wrong or what to do about their feelings. And when you ask, "How was your day?" they end the conversation quickly with "Fine." How can you find out how their day went or get them to talk to you?

- Ask questions that do not have simple "yes" and "no" answers.
- Ask about something specific: Who did you eat lunch with? Who did you play with outside? Did you have music class? What happened today that was funny?
- Take a few quiet minutes just before bedtime to tell your child how proud you are of him or her.

Employers and Parents as Partners for Kids' School Success

by Sue Levy, Work and Family Director, NC Equity Work and Family Center (1 -800-451 8065, ext. 23)

Most employers understand that parents do better at work when they aren't worrying about their kids. Most parents who work outside the home want to be involved in their children's education. Here are three steps that parents and employers can take to help make the workplace more "family friendly":

Step 1: Figure out which parenting and school situations create stress at work.

Try talking with co-workers who also have children. Make a list of situations related to kids and school that sometimes interfere with work. Problem situations might be defined as ones that make you late or that distract you with many phone calls.

Step 2: Try to think of ways your employer could help.

Are there any work policy changes or resources that might make it easier for workers to cope with these situations? Two examples of low-cost strategies that some employers use to help working parents: 1) information and support programs and 2) flexible work schedules.

Employers can provide **information and support** to parents by:

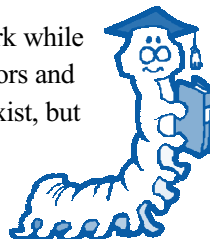
- Setting up bulletin boards or distributing information from local agencies and schools.
- Inviting free speakers to visit the workplace to meet with employees during breaks.
- Encouraging parents to form a support group to share information and plan events.
- Offering a private phone for calls to teachers, health care providers, and counselors.

Employers can help parents by offering **work schedule flexibility**:

- Give employees the option to adjust regular arrival and departure times up to one hour.
- Allow employees to make up time by shortening meal or break periods.
- If a regular schedule can't be changed, allow flexibility on some days with advance supervisor approval (This will help with school conferences and teacher workdays.).
- Consider giving employees several paid hours each year for school meetings.
- Consider allowing employees to use sick leave for family medical appointments.

Step 3: Have several employees meet with a supervisor or manager to discuss ideas.

If you want to work towards helping parents to do their best at work while also meeting their children's needs, share your ideas with supervisors and ask for their feedback. Some programs or policies might already exist, but people may simply need more information about them. If there are no helpful programs or policies in place, ask if a group of employees and managers can meet to consider some new ideas.



Upcoming Events

Mid-September, 1998

Conference on Teenage Pregnancy and Parenthood

The Center for Documentary Studies in Durham, NC is currently planning a one-day conference that will look at teenage parenthood as it is experienced from many different perspectives.

Through September 19, the Center also has a photography exhibition called *The Youngest Parents*; a sample of photographs from the exhibit can be found at this website: <http://aaswebsv.aas.duke.edu/docstudies/doubletake/issues/07/leemoses/> For more conference information call Chris Sims at (919) 660-3664.

November 18-19, 1998

Parent & Community Involvement Best Practices Conference "Promoting Success with Children Is Everybody's Business"

Holiday Inn Four Seasons/Koury Convention Center, Greensboro, NC
Registration fee: \$60.00

Parents and educators are invited to attend this conference whose objectives are:

- To promote a greater awareness of the advantages and need for increased parent/community involvement in education.
- To highlight some of the best practices in parent/community involvement; especially, in the area of "hard to reach parents".
- To define a broad action framework to increase family involvement in NC public schools.

For more information call (919) 715-2205.

Who are the “Educators” of Our Children?

by Barbara Gomez, MS, Program Consultant Family Preservation & Family Support Services

Who are the “educators” of our children? I’m sure we all agree that the parent is first and foremost! Informal community supports (like friends, family, clergy, teachers, coaches and so on) also come to mind when we hear this question. We may be likely to answer this question based on the assumption that all families are strong, stable and thriving. But, is the answer to this question that obvious? Are we taking into account **all families** when we ponder this question?

We don’t usually think about families that aren’t flourishing, unless it’s a part of our everyday reality. Some of us have had to look at this question at a much deeper level—especially those of us who work in the field of child welfare. We know too well that all families are not thriving; there are too many that need more formal help to nurture and educate their children. People who are not close to this reality, personally or professionally, are not inclined to think about families at risk for break-up because of isolation, poverty, domestic violence, substance abuse, mental and physical illness. The list goes on. For these families, educators include anyone who comes into contact with the family.

Indeed, it does take a village to raise a child. Both informal and formal networks need to be in place to support families at all levels of functioning. As we begin to define and implement a statewide view of parenting education, let us not forget those families at risk or in crisis.

New Child Care Law Improves Child Care Quality, Helps Parent Choice

by Berta Hammerstein, NC Division of Child Development

A new child care law for North Carolina is already having a major impact on the quality of the places children receive care. The law responds to a flood of recent research findings confirming the importance of the early years to a child’s later learning ability. Here are the highlights of the law:

- All center directors and lead teachers must obtain a credential in early childhood development from their local community college, unless they already have other education determined to be equivalent by the Division of Child Development. Over half already have the required education.
- Providers in family child care homes must complete annual ongoing training in child development, although they are not

required to get a child care credential. They must have activities and play materials available that are suitable for the children in their care. Household members in child care homes, in addition to the providers, are required to undergo criminal record checks.

- In the future, each child care facility (center or family child care home) will receive a rated license. The lowest level will tell parents that the center or home has met the basic requirements for licensing. Higher ratings will reflect higher quality features in programs and provider qualifications.

For more information related to child care or early brain development, contact the NC Division of Child Development at 1-800-8590829 or search the Division’s new website at <http://www.state.nc.us/DHR/DCD/search/daycare.htm>.

A Phone Call Away?

by Ken Brockenbrough, Council on Developmental Disabilities

NC parents have a long list of free resources available to them. The toll free numbers below are two of the many groups who are willing to help parents and those who work with parents.

First Step Hotline is an information, referral, and advocacy service for parents with a focus on health, pregnancy and early development. Call 1-800 FOR Baby (367-2229) or 1-800-243-7889 on TTY.

The Family Support Network of NC offers information and resources for ALL families who have children with special needs and the professionals who serve them. They have a Central Directory of Resources, a Lending Library, Parent-to-Parent Programs, and Foster Parent Services. Call 1-800-852-0042.



From: _____

To: _____

