

# Parenting Education Network

The North Carolina Parenting Education Network (NCPEN) is working to build the field of parenting education in the state with a focus on partnerships between parents and child care providers, teachers, and parent educators. Working together, we can help each child reach his or her potential. NCPEN is an unfunded collaboration of parenting education organizations and agencies. For more information about NCPEN, see our web site at [www.ncpen.org](http://www.ncpen.org).

## An Overview of Family Support and Fatherhood/Father Involvement

by Stephanie Moore - Parent, Business Owner, NCPEN Member

Fathers' economic responsibility for their families has been the focus of most efforts in public policy and other arenas to increase fathers' involvement in their children's lives. But the importance of fathers' emotional connection to their children has been largely ignored.

While it is a basic tenet of family support that widely diverse family structures produce healthy, happy children, there is no denying that children always benefit from the emotional nurturing and developmental support provided by caring adults, both men and women.

The challenge for those who seek to increase fathers' involvement in their children's lives is to support all fathers in their roles as nurturers and emotional caregivers. Efforts have sprung up across the country in answer to this challenge. Parent education and family support programs especially have an obligation to contribute to this growing movement to support all level of fathers.

### **Working With Fathers**

Programs should emphasize the interdependence of all family members. There is a continued need to create these programs to assist both mothers and fathers in getting the support, skills, and education they need to be successful parents.

Many men who desperately want to nurture and support their children are

prevented from providing financial support by economic conditions beyond their control. In addition, societal pressures and stereotypes often inhibit fathers from taking on the role of emotional nurturer.

Specialized programs can promote father involvement by creating opportunities for fathers in all family configurations to participate in their children's lives. This means:

- Creating a safe environment for fathers to create emotional bonds with their children so that they see themselves as nurturers and care givers
- Recognizing that sometimes fathers are the sole caretakers of their children and providing them with the same supports and resources that are provided to single mothers
- When working with two-parent families, involving both parents in activities, parenting classes, and other programs
- Giving noncustodial fathers special opportunities to strengthen their bonds with their children
- Providing opportunities for fathers to network and learn from each other
- Offering services and parent-child activities during non-working hours

Programs should strive to treat mothers and fathers as partners in nurturing

and supporting their children. This requires a great deal of flexibility, since parents may not always get along and may be divorced or estranged. Program staff often serve as moderators during conflicts. Staff should help parents to see that when their desire to win an argument conflicts with the needs of their child, the needs of the child must prevail.

Finally, programs should be sensitive to the needs of single fathers, who may benefit from meeting other men in their situation. Parent education and family support programs are well positioned to help these and all fathers fulfill their commitment to their families.

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## Incarcerated Dads: A growing audience for parenting educators

by Karen DeBord - Associate Professor, State Extension Specialist for Child Development and Parenting Education, North Carolina State University, NCPEN member

Today, most prison inmates are also fathers, a situation that has led to increased focus on incarcerated dads and their non-incarcerated families. Estimates suggest that approximately two-thirds of state and three-quarters of federal inmates in the United States are fathers. However, most research dealing with incarceration and family relationships focuses on mothers and the problems they confront as parents in prison.

Parenting educators who are asked to plan programs for fathers in prison should first learn about their audience and not try to guess what these fathers will need. Designing a program based on voiced needs of the clientele is critical. Learners who are part of a voluntary and willing audience are more likely to open their minds to concepts and ideas that are taught.

One way to design the program is to identify representatives from the potential attendees who will meet in a focus group setting and share their stories and needs. By taking into consideration the needs of the focus group, the educator can show the remaining potential attendees that he/she has their needs in mind and, it is hoped, can convince them to become more open and willing learners.

The educator also must understand some of what fathers in prison worry about. Taken from the research literature, here is a brief overview of their concerns (Lanier, 1995):

- Keeping their legal parenting rights while in prison
- Having to depend on friends and family outside prison for economic support of their families including transportation for visits
- Explaining their incarceration to their children

- Dealing with the negative visiting conditions while trying to develop a meaningful relationship with children
- Facing dilemmas with their child's care givers on the outside

Incarcerated fathers may become depressed, anxious and lose self-esteem, and feel powerless and sad. Many feel guilty, and they often feel responsible for the problems their children experience at home. There is compounded concern that someone else will replace them in the parental role and that children will forget them. Then near the time of release, fathers worry that they won't fit into the home life since the outside caregiver and the children have been operating independently without them (Lanier, 1995).

Several major themes have emerged from research regarding the impact of parental incarceration on children. First, separation from a parent is likely to be traumatic, disrupt personal and family bonds, and worsen the family's social and financial situation. Behavioral problems also tend to emerge in limited numbers of children, with problems usually relating to family supports and coping mechanisms. However, it has also been found that most children do not engage in severe antisocial behavior at the time of their parent's incarceration, although boys in their early teens may be at greater risk of conduct problems. This type of behavior appears more likely to emerge in existing dysfunctional family situations (Gabel, 1995).

The children of incarcerated parents may be cared for by various family members or other persons, but there is a key difference in the situations involving incarcerated fathers and incarcerated mothers. Typically, the children of incarcerated fathers continue to be cared for by their mother, but the children of incarcerated mothers rarely are cared for by their father (Gabel, 1995).

Parenting education programs are being sought by prison systems and communities that are interested in supporting children while building relationships between children and their incarcerated fathers. Educational programs for fathers generally are offered in a series of classes that combine information about personal esteem with information about children's development and how to maintain communication with children.

Other programs have been designed using typical characteristics of offender parents. These characteristics hurt a parent's ability to relate well with their families. Eight characteristics were defined by Ross and Fabiano (1985):

- Impulsiveness
- Putting the blame for their actions on other people and believing that their life is beyond their control
- Lack of concrete reasoning
- Rigidity and intolerance
- Shortage of interpersonal problem-solving skills
- Egocentricity
- Underdeveloped values
- Critical reasoning problems

These characteristics contribute to the emergence of other parenting problems, such as poor communication, inconsistency, inappropriate or ineffective discipline, and the failure to apply problem-solving skills in family interaction or teach such skills to children.

To engage the father-learner, you as the educator must, above all, develop a supportive relationship with him so he will understand you are interested in helping him. Listen carefully to his specific needs and plan accordingly. If you run a series of classes, plan thought provoking homework that can provide continuity from visit to visit and keep the father thinking about positive interactions with his child during visits and upon release from prison. Finally, suggest ways he can share the information learned through your outreach with the caregivers of his children on the outside.

## Local Smart Start Programs Promote Responsible Fatherhood Initiative

by Sally Sloop - Family Support Specialist, N.C. Partnership for Children, NCPEN member

More of North Carolina's children are growing up without the financial support or the emotional and physical involvement of their fathers. Lacking this involvement, our children face the increased risk of growing up in poverty, dropping out of school, becoming teenage parents, and experiencing other behavioral problems. To help support and link community members to this cause and concern, local Smart Start programs across North Carolina have responded to former Governor James B. Hunt Jr.'s request for help.

Through a collaboration between the North Carolina Commission for Responsible Fatherhood (Mitch Braswell, Director) and the N.C. Partnership for Children (Sally Sloop, Family Support Specialist), six regional Fatherhood Summits were organized and held by local Smart Start partnerships between November and December of 2000. Over 1,300 participants, including representatives from nearly all 100 counties engaged in dialogue and networking around the needs of North Carolina's fathers. Each community planning team designed their gathering to address local needs and issues. Themes ranged from "Fathers Matter! I reached the Summit" to "Fathers Build a Brighter Future" and "Lean on Me!" One summit that drew more than 200 fathers engaged 100 dads, including many of their children, in a Christmas parade!

Panels of fathers spoke of their experiences at each summit. Guest speakers included U.S. Senator John Edwards, Union County Sheriff Frank McGuirt, Former Assistant Secretary of N.C. DHHS Peter Leousis, and N.C. Responsible Fatherhood Commission Chairman Rev. Rufus Stark. Speakers and workshop leaders offered knowledge and insight into the history of fatherhood, the roles fathers share as a vital human resource in the lives of their children, and the constraints that challenge responsible fatherhood. Summit workshops and sessions allowed participants the opportunity to develop follow-up plans for back home. In all, the information provided at each summit evoked a rich understanding of challenges facing today's fathers and set forth suggestions and solutions for progress. The combined summit experiences made obvious the need for renewed understanding and appreciation of the important roles fathers play in the lives of their children and families. One summit's banner summed the heart of these combined efforts by quoting Frederick Douglass: "It is easier to build strong children than to repair broken men."

For more information contact: Sally Sloop, NCPEN 919-821-9576 or Mitch Braswell, Commission on Responsible Fatherhood 919-715-5850

## New Kids Count Data Book, 2000: State Profiles of Child Well-Being

now available!

KIDS COUNT, a project of the Annie E. Casey Foundation, is a national and state-by-state effort to track the status of children in the United States. By providing policymakers and citizens with benchmarks of child well-being,

KIDS COUNT seeks to enrich local, state, and national discussions concerning ways to secure better futures for all children. At the national level, the principal activity of the initiative is the publication of the annual KIDS COUNT Data Book, which uses the best available data to measure the educational, social, economic, and physical well-being of children. The foundation also funds a nationwide network of state-level KIDS COUNT projects that provide a more detailed, community-by-community picture of the condition of children..

For a complete copy of this report and access to downloadable data, visit the [www.aecf.org/kidscount](http://www.aecf.org/kidscount) website

## UPCOMING EVENTS

**Child and Family Development Conference: Building Communities Around Children and Families** with T. Berry Brazelton, M.D., March 28 - 29, UNC-Charlotte, N.C. *For more information: Dr. Bobbie Rowland UNC Charlotte 704-687-4719*

**Out of the Shadows of Family Violence**, April 9-11, Greensboro, N.C.

*For more information: 1-877-644-0314 or 919-829-8009; 1-800-354-KIDS or visit [www.childabuse.org](http://www.childabuse.org)*

**2001 Regional Family Support and Fatherhood Summit**

May 2 - 4, Denver, Colo. *For more information: 303-837-8466, ext. 112, or e-mail [virginiam@what-works.org](mailto:virginiam@what-works.org)*

**Georgia Council on Child Abuse 17th Annual Training Symposium and APSAC Advanced Training Institutes:**

**The Power of Prevention: Give Children Back Their Childhood**

July 29 - August 1, Atlanta, GA  
*For more information: 404-870-6565*

**Support and Fatherhood Summit: Learning & the Brain**

May 2-4, Washington, D.C.  
*For more information: 617-469-6789*

**National Fatherhood Initiative's 4th Annual Summit on Fatherhood**

June 7-8, Washington, D.C.  
*For more information: 301-948-0599 or [www.fatherhood.org](http://www.fatherhood.org)*

**Men Are Nurturers, Too (M.A.N.2)**

June 14-15, Durham, N.C.  
*For more information: 919-966-4032 or [www.sph.unc.edu/occe](http://www.sph.unc.edu/occe)*

## North Carolina Parenting Education Network

If you or your organization is interested in becoming a member of the North Carolina Parenting Education Network please visit our website at [www.ncpen.org](http://www.ncpen.org).

If you are an individual wishing to **subscribe** to the North Carolina Parenting Education Network Newsletter please fill out the following information:

Taken from the NCPEN bylaws:  
Membership Dues - Each member of the association shall pay annual dues of ten (\$10.00) and organizational dues of twenty-five (\$25) dollars due and payable on July 1, of the calendar year. Nonpayment of dues, after one year, shall cause a member to be dropped from membership in the association.

Benefits of membership include a 4 issues of the NCPEN newsletters per year for individuals and 200 copies of 4 issues of the newsletters for organizations (or more for a fee).



### NCPEN Membership Application

Please print:

**Individual membership** (\$10.00)

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

Employer \_\_\_\_\_

Phone Number \_\_ (\_\_\_\_) \_\_\_\_\_

E-mail address \_\_\_\_\_

**Organizational Membership** (\$25)

Name of Organization \_\_\_\_\_

Number of parent educators in organization \_\_\_\_\_

Organizational website if applicable \_\_\_\_\_

Contact e-mail address \_\_\_\_\_

Mail to:

#### NCPEN

c/o Gina Wells, Treasurer

313 Chapanoke Road Ste.140

Raleigh, NC 27603

Make check or money order to:

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