

Training **MATTERS**



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- N.C. Division of Social Services
- N.C. Association of County Directors of Social Services
- Appalachian Family Innovations at Appalachian State University
- Independent Living Resources, Inc.
- N.C. State University Department of Social Work
- N.C. A & T State University Social Work Program
- Resources for Change, Inc.
- UNC-Chapel Hill School of Social Work (Jordan Institute for Families)
- UNC-Chapel Hill School of Medicine
- UNC-Greensboro Department of Social Work

We Want To Hear from You!

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Visit Our Website

Go to www.trainingmatters-nc.org.

This issue of *Training Matters* was produced by John McMahon of the UNC-Chapel Hill School of Social Work.

References for this issue can be found at www.trainingmatters-nc.org

Parenting Classes and Child Welfare in North Carolina

Every day, judges and social workers in North Carolina and across the United States refer parents to parenting classes. They do so in the hopes of making families more harmonious and children safer. If the family is receiving child welfare services, often attendance at these classes is compulsory. If parents don't successfully complete the class, they may increase their risk of losing their children.

Clearly, parenting classes are very important to our child welfare system. Despite this fact, like most states, North Carolina has no system for delivering parenting education. In some communities parenting classes are offered by a great many disconnected organizations, including hospitals, senior centers, family resource centers, United Ways, YWCAs, PTAs, and various civic groups (NCPEN, 2004).

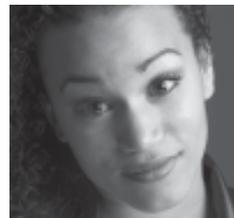
The courses offered by these many groups often have different approaches and philosophies, target audiences, and goals. Some courses have been evaluated and proven to be effective, others have not. Most are taught by qualified parenting educators, but not all. The number and availability of courses varies significantly across the state, especially when you compare urban and rural counties.

In the absence of a statewide system, it falls to each local county department of social services to oversee the parenting classes prescribed for the families it serves. On their own—there is no state child welfare policy related to parenting classes—county DSS's must ensure there are parenting classes in their communities and that these classes are accessible to their clients, appropriate to their needs, and effective.

Agencies shoulder this tremendous responsibility every day. In an effort to make this less of a challenge, *Training Matters* offers the following.

Sound Advice

Few people know more about parenting education in North Carolina than Dr. Karen DeBord. An Associate Professor at NC State University and a State Cooperative Extension Specialist, DeBord has provided leadership to state and national groups and written extensively about the topic of parenting education. Her advice to county DSS's about parenting classes includes the following:



At least 20% of the families most at risk for child maltreatment do not complete parenting programs (CDC, 2004).

Photo Illustration

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Good Instructors Are Essential.

“When parents come to that first mandated class they are often so angry,” DeBord says. “They are dealing not only with the humiliation and stigma of being made to come to a class on parenting, but sometimes with the pain of having lost their child.” These feelings often cloud parents’ abilities to learn. To save face, often all they will want to do is go through the motions, get their certificate, and get out.

To get past this obstacle, agencies should look for an instructor who can recognize what parents are feeling, engage them, and build their trust.

Build the Course Around What Parents Want. DeBord says that one of the best ways to overcome resistance is to begin each parenting course by asking parents what they want to learn about. “Even if you have a curriculum you want to offer, it is best to begin by soliciting advice from the parents. “The expert model,” DeBord says, “creates barriers.”

Effective Courses

If you decide to offer a formal parenting curriculum, you will find there are MANY to choose from. Here are some that studies have shown to be effective. Excerpts are from the July/August 2004 issue of the *CB Express*.

Parents as Teachers (PAT)

Audience: Parents of young children, esp. teen mothers

Emphasis: Imparting knowledge about brain research and



DeBord

child development. The course emphasizes certain points in a child’s development. “Parents learn what to expect at each stage, from pregnancy to kindergarten.”

Benefits: PAT has been shown to be particularly helpful with teen mothers. PAT children have significantly better school readiness scores, compared to other comparable groups of children.

Availability: There are 85 PAT programs active in North Carolina. To find the program nearest you, go to <www.patnc.org> and select “find a program.”

Home Instruction for Parents of Preschool Youngsters (HIPPIY)

Audience: Parents of young children

Description: “Parents in the community are trained as educators who then visit the homes of the families enrolled in HIPPIY. During their weekly visits, the educators bring books and other materials and help the parents work with their 3- to 5-year-old children on school readiness skills. Educators also are trained to help parents navigate other services that might be helpful for them and their children.”

Availability: Not currently offered in North Carolina, according to <hippyusa.org>.

The Parent Project

Audience: Parents of school-aged children and teenagers

Description: “Parents attend the 10-week course to learn about the dangers that teens face and to learn skills to supervise

their own teenagers. This program has become popular throughout the nation and is now the largest court-mandated or juvenile diversion program in the country.”

Availability: Not offered in North Carolina, according to <www.parentproject.com>.

Finding Parenting Classes in North Carolina

NC Cooperative Extension Service. Every county cooperative extension service has someone in the office whose job it is to be an information provider and education partner to the community around parenting education (among other things). Consult the phone book or visit <www.ces.ncsu.edu/counties>

NC Parenting Education Network. This organization offers professional recognition to parenting educators. To access its listing of credentialed parenting educators in North Carolina, go to <www.ncpen.org>

The Parenting Institute. This Winston-Salem-based nonprofit helps communities across NC find qualified parenting instructors, promote and offer parenting classes, and develop their own stable, sustainable parent education resources. Its website (www.theparentinginstitute.org) features a statewide directory of parenting education professionals and other resources.

Learn More

Additional information on this topic can be found online at <www.trainingmatters-nc.org>