

Parenting Connection

Volume 1, Issue 3

March/April 2005

Keeping In Touch



It is important for incarcerated parents to stay in touch with their children.

On February 9th ten fathers in the Parenting Class at Stanley Correctional Institution had the opportunity to make Valentines for their children. The men were provided with paper of various colors, glue sticks, scissors, and glitter. They created cards of various shapes and sizes and wrote personal messages inside to their children. The men had to provide their own envelopes and postage.

This activity was well received by students. It gave them a unique opportunity to stay in touch. Using simple but effective ideas such as this helps bridge the communication between an incarcerated parent and their children.



INSIDE THIS ISSUE

- 1 Keeping In Touch
- 1 Greetings Fellow Parenting Instructors
- 2 Babies learn to reason earlier than expected, searcher finds
- 2 Words to Live By
- 3 Father's Group at WRC
- 4 Resource Corner
- 4 Nurturing Parents SIG
- 5 Parenting 911

Greetings Fellow Parenting Instructors

Wow, where has the time gone. It is time to send out our third newsletter to each other. Diane and I have been trying to think of topics that people would like to hear about. We would like to hear from you neat people out there working in the programs as to what you would like to know about each others programs. Please contact either Diane Birch or Mary Dahl ASAP.

We thought of two possible topics: One being ideas for activities that you find to be most useful to the men. If you could send brief description of the project or activity with instructions on how to carry it out.

Second, we would have a *Dear Abby* type column called Parenting 911 where people could ask questions of each other and then anyone could offer help or suggestions. We are all so busy these days that we don't have a lot of time, but would offer advice or suggestions to someone else in need. Since our newsletter goes out via the email, we all have a few minutes to help out a fellow instructor.

I just thought of one more while I'm writing and that would be: Has anyone come across some new materials that look good or that they have tried and find worthy of passing the information on to others? We welcome pictures also. The nice person at WRC that puts our paper together says we can include pictures.

Please keep us abreast of what's happening at your sights. We are trying to get a news article out six times a year. We can only do so much, we really need your help. ❖

Thank you,
Mary Dahl GBCI
Diane Birch, SCI



"Babies learn to reason earlier than expected, researcher finds."

From the Chicago Tribune 2000



Infants are smart enough to know by three months of age that people can't walk through walls. But surprising new research shows that by 6 months their ability to assess the outside world has expanded to include predicting human behavior.

The findings by University of Chicago psychologist Amanda Woodward indicates that a baby's development of social reasoning skills, such as guessing the intentions of adults, begins much earlier than previously thought and shows the importance of early experience in brain development.

Researches had assumed that the first burst of intellectual growth didn't start until after age 1, when many babies say their first word and point to objects.

But the new study suggests that long before the first word is uttered, and at a time when many parents think that little is going on in the infant's mind, babies are observing cues from their environment that enable them to learn how to interact with people and what to expect from them.

By watching their parents and other people, babies quickly learn that human behavior is goal-oriented, a reasoning skill that enables them to make sense out of a world that otherwise is overrun with sounds, sights, and other stimulating experiences.

In Woodward's study, infants at 6 months were more intent on looking at a new toy that an adult hand had grabbed than the motion of the hand in grasping the toy, an indication that, like adults, they are more interested in the goal than in the action used to reach that goal.

When the human hand was replaced by a mechanical claw, babies showed little interest in either the toy that it grasped or the motion of the robot are, suggesting that human involvement is critical to interpreting intent, Woodward said.

Words to Live By

10 Commitments for Parents

1. I will always love and respect my child for who he is and not for what I want him to be.
2. I will not burden my child with emotions and problems she is not equipped to deal with, remembering that I am the parent and she is the child.
3. I will, when discipline is necessary, let my child know that I disapprove of what he or she does, not who he is.
4. I will set limits for my child and help her find security in knowing what is expected of her.
5. I will make time for my child and cherish our moments together, realizing how important and fleeting they are.
6. I will create a loving home environment and show my child that she is loved, whenever and however I can.
7. I will be sure to give my child space to grow, to dream, to succeed, and even to fail.
8. I will encourage my child to experience the world and all its possibilities, guiding her in its ways and taking pains to leave her careful but not fearful.
9. I will take care of myself physically and emotionally so that I can be there for my child when he needs me.
10. I will try to be the kind of person I want my child to grow up to be loving, fair-minded, moral, giving and helpful.



Fathers' Group at WRC

The Fathers' group at WRC started two years ago and meets two times a month.

The objective of the group is to promote healthy attitudes toward children by learning more about children. To help the participants connect better or reconnect with their children and to support each other while we try to connect with the children.

We have had a few speakers come in to address these topics. A counselor from the Christine Ann Center for Domestic Abuse came and presented a program about gender differences. The participants really liked this person and the discussion was very interesting, especially since I was the only person defending my gender.

Another speaker, Albert Holmes, director of the Fathers' Family Support Network in Milwaukee, gave the men a real pep talk on how incarceration impacts children in the community. He didn't mince words when he spoke about recreational sex and the number of births it creates and how these children are abandoned by their fathers. He gave many resources for the participants to check out when they are released, so they can stay out and support the children that they have. He even offered to help any person individually by offering his phone number to them. I asked the offenders to write a few comments about the group and the speaker.

Here's a little of what they said....

"Being in Fathers' support group is a way for me to continue learning about fatherhood even while in prison. Being a father is a lifelong learning experience. I loved what Mr. Holmes had to say about parenting and being a man." K.W.

"Fathers' group gives me encouragement to stay in contact with my children even though I am incarcerated. It will help to break down the stigma and stereotypes of the deadbeat dad syndrome by providing skills and tools to utilize when dealing with my children. The information and support help me relate to problem solving in my family even though I am absent from the household." Q.W.

"In Fathers' support group I learn about my rights as a father, and how to be a better father. I learn what movies are good to watch with my kids." P.F.

"In Fathers' Group we discuss children and how to make the mothers stop thinking the kids are all theirs." D.C.

"I enjoy the group because I get to voice my thoughts about some issues dealing with my kids. I can really get through weeks at a time because I get to vent and not be judged." N.S.

"In group I want to help others as well as myself to stay in focus of their goals regardless of the trials and tribulations of being here. I want to be able to show unconditional love and explore the world with my children." M.W.

"Ms. Knox makes learning about parenthood a fun experience. She teaches in a humorous way and allows us to truly express how we feel. I've been in her group for nearly a year. We have worked together as a team to identify problems that we have had in our relationships with our children. The lessons and materials help us gain positive strategies and techniques that we can use in the future. Mr. Holmes came and provided us with a lot of resources to use when we get out of prison. He said parenthood should be carefully planned and not something that results from recreational sex. Many of us found out "too late" we really didn't want to be parents at all. The group is very helpful to me." S.F.

Submitted by Mary K. Knox WRC



Send articles and comments to:

Diane Birch
Stanley Correctional Institution
100 Corrections Drive
Stanley, WI 54768
Diane.birch@doc.state.wi.us
745-644-2960 x 3406

Newsletter entry and layout:
Sandy Sterr-Heavener, WRC



Nurturing Parents SIG

Expands Scope of Activities

The scope of activities in which the Nurturing Parents Special Interest Group is involved continues to grow.

On February 21, Diane Birch (SCI), Mary Dahl (GBCI), Jerry Bednarowski (WRC), and Sandy Sterr-Heavener (WRC) met to develop a recommended curriculum for Parenting programs. A draft of the recommendations was sent to all Parenting instructors and DOC Education Directors for their input.

After the responses are reviewed and incorporated, a final draft of the recommendations will be sent to Denise Symdon. She will share it with the Wardens' workgroup that is in charge of program planning. Jerry Bednarowski will present the recommendations at the DOC Education Directors meeting on April 13.

If approved, these recommendations will be required of any program designed to satisfy the DOC Classification Need "Parenting" that appears on inmate's PRC summaries. Individual institutions who do not wish to meet the recommended standards may still offer a Parenting program with requirements less than the standards, but these programs will not satisfy the inmates' Classification Need.

The Nurturing Parents SIG is exploring the possibility of scheduling a Parenting Training workshop at which the parenting instructors will learn more about the curriculum recommendations, review suggested materials, learn instructional techniques and share ideas.

The National CEA organization has suggested that our Parenting Special Interest Group go national. We are planning to pursue this. Jerry Bednarowski has agreed to serve as Chair of the Special Interest Group. He will submit for approval the goals and plans for the proposed SIG to the CEA President's Council.

To publicize the new Parenting SIG, an article will be written for the national CEA newsletter, "News & Notes". Jerry will also propose presenting a workshop on "Establishing a Parenting Network" at the International CEA Conference held in Des Moines in July.

This bi-monthly newsletter will expand to a national newsletter. It will include articles on programs in other states, as well as, Wisconsin.

We will continue to annually update our Guide to Successful Parenting Programs for Wisconsin programs. A call for revisions to the Guide will be

made September 1, with a due date of October 1. The revised Guide will be distributed at the DOC Education Directors Meeting in November and available to all parenting instructors.

In addition to the Wisconsin Guide, a national directory of educators involved with Parenting Classes, Parent/Child Book Projects, Fathers/Mothers Support Groups, Parent Fairs, and other programs related to Parenting will be developed.

If you have ideas for other services which can be provided by the Nurturing Parents Special Interest Group, contact Diane Birch, Mary Dahl or Jerry Bednarowski

Resource Corner:

Children Are From Heaven

by John Gray, Ph.D.

This book is based on the idea that children respond better to positive rather than negative reinforcement. This book concentrates on rewarding, not punishing, children and foster their innate desire to please their parents. He bases his ideas on five basic principles that children need to learn over and over again.

- It's okay to be different.
- It's okay to make mistakes.
- It's okay to express negative emotions.
- It's okay to want more.
- It's okay to say no, but remember Mom and Dad are the bosses.

Loving your child is not Enough- Positive discipline that works

by Nancy Samalin

This book includes the answers to parents' most-often-asked questions. It is an easy reader and I have enough copies for all the men to read. It answers some questions that I can't.

Boys into Men: Raising our African American teenage sons written by Nancy Boyd Franklin PhD and A.J. Franklin PhD. It talks about how to foster a positive racial identity, promotes sexual responsibility, how to overcome negative influences, advocates for their sons' education, and counters the problems of racial profiling, drugs and gangs.

This book is an excellent resource for black parents guiding their sons through the high-risk teenage years. I require all the African American students to read this book. They really like it because it instructs, and affirms what an African American thinks life should be.





Parenting 911

Dear Dispatcher,

I have a question as to whether anyone else finds the Active Parenting series, for both age groups 5-12 and Teens, to be a bit repetitive. I find myself repeating a great deal of information and my parenting students are sure to remind me that we covered that topic already. I have added information on suicide, violence, and eating disorders, but I'm just not happy with the way this section is going. If anyone has a suggestion on how I can improve my class, please let me know.

*In Need Of Activities,
J. Beres (JCI)*

Also, I would like to thank the person that informed us about the Nanny 911 Television Series. I finally took the time to give the show a view. I found the show to be excellent. It has not been aired consistently, I don't know why that is, but I would like to point out that Nanny 911 and Super Nanny are different shows. Super Nanny isn't bad, but I prefer the other. I used a taping in my class and it worked very well. I stopped the tape before the nanny revealed the problems in the household. I then had a discussion, with my students, as to what they think is the problem. I was pleased when my students were able to see that the family lacked any kind of respect for each other and that the use of a polite request goes a long way.

If anyone would like to add any suggestions to further help with this problem, please email Barbara.Rasmussen@doc.state.wi.us She will happily contact **The Dispatcher** with your comments. Also, if you have any other questions you would like discussed, the Dispatcher would cheerfully respond.



Dear Dispatcher,

I am looking for more up-to-date things that are happening in corrections that would help to get the men to turn into more positive thinkers. I have tried to look up Parenting Behind Bars or just parenting. I would really be happy if someone could give me some more ideas of how to get them to change their negative attitudes.

Mary at GBCI

Dear Mary,

This is a difficult problem. Consider that many men have many issues – anger management, drug and alcohol, or just being locked up for possibly a very long time. Added to the mix is that some men cannot see their children frequently, if at all, or they may not even know where they are! They may be very worried about the children's living arrangements, or the news they just heard from the home about some trouble in the family. Their plates are very full.

First, let's look at some of the statistics and problems regarding incarcerated parents. Over 1 million parents are in our nation's jails and prisons, and this affects 2.3 million children. (Child Welfare League of America at www.cwla.org)

Children of incarcerated parents have a 5 times greater risk of being incarcerated when they become adults as other children do. They stand a greater chance of living in poverty, suffer from stigmas attached because they have incarcerated parents, or may feel guilt, fear or anxiety because of the incarceration of their parents (Mazza 9-10).

If an incarcerated parent get visits, it is always under surveillance. The children may be offered privileges that the parents don't have (like handling money while visiting), which creates a role reversal for parents (Mazza 9-10 from the Family and Corrections Network at www.fcnetwork.org). This can create additional stress on the relationship.

Children of incarcerated parents may behave more aggressively or have difficulty concentrating. Problems with behavior or learning may become more intense, or are dealt with poorly, if the parent is incarcerated (Santana www.asentenceoftheirown.com)

The above statistics and arguments makes it easy to understand why some of the men may have a negative viewpoint, but...there they are, sitting in your parenting class. **Now what?**

Continued on page 6



A starting point might be to give the incarcerated parent this information, plainly and simply. Inform them that they have a choice of letting their children become a statistic or not. Their participation in the class indicates that they care about their children, and they have taken a major step in improving the lives of their children. Use the incarceration as a challenge.

Another tool is to build their esteem. A quote from an article by Dr. Randell Turner, the Vice President of Long Distance Dads, National Fatherhood Initiative, stated, "If you really want to change the hearts of men – change how they view themselves. Get them to truly see themselves for who they were, are today and who they are becoming" (www.fcnetwork.org). You may need to have the incarcerated parents examine their values, define what they want for their children specifically, and discuss ways to approach this with children, even though they are locked up. This can, however, give them some real influence in their children's lives. Develop some activities that can help this cause. North Carolina has a program that is attempting to put some of these pieces together that you may be able to adapt to your classroom (www.ces.ncsu.edu). Karen DeBord's article "Incarcerated Fathers: Extending their Parenting Knowledge to the Outside" has a link to some homework pages they use in their classes.

There are also some concrete activities that were gleaned from the Journal of Extension Oct. 2003 (www.joe.org/joe/october2003/iw4.shtml) like make-a-hug, bookmarks, placements, or name poem. These activities can create or reestablish the bonds that may be fragile or disconnected now. It can give the parents a sense of *doing* something for their child and a sense of importance, which may in turn create a changed in attitude.

Obviously this barely scratches the surface, but your dispatcher hopes it can give you a bit of relief.

Happy teaching,
The Dispatcher

If anyone would like to add any suggestions to further help with this problem, please email barbara.rasmussen@doc.state.wi.us. She will happily contact The Dispatcher with your comments. Also, if you have any other questions you would like discussed, the Dispatcher would cheerfully respond.

