

Parenting Connection

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Early Activities Impact Brain Development



Deborah McNelis founded the company braininsights™ with the goal of having everyone understand that experiences early in life have an impact on the developing brain.

Over 85% of a baby's brain development will happen after birth and a great deal of that development will happen based on the experiences a child has in the early years.

To help parents, early childhood educators, parent educators, and others to make a difference in the brain development of the children in their life or community, Deborah created braininsights™. The braininsights™ materials apply brain development concepts to real life situations. Brain development isn't about pushing children to learn more at early ages nor having the perfect toys. It is about providing fun learning experiences and loving interactions with your child.

Positive, interactive and fun experiences with family have a definite impact on a child's brain development. The brain development activities are designed to easily fit into busy lives. Each Brain Development Activity Packet holds 40 activity ideas created to make the early years positive for both the parent and the baby. Each packet contains an explanation of how the baby's brain benefits from each activity.

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The Parenting Connection is a publication of the Parenting Special Interest Group and the Wisconsin Chapter of the Correctional Education Association.

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When completed, there will be six packets in the braininsights™ Activity Series:

- Love Your Baby
- Fun While I'm One
- More to Do While I'm Two
- Play With Me While I am Three
- Let's Learn More While I am Four
- Help Me Thrive While I am Five

Thus far, the first three packets in the series have been released and are available at www.braininsightsonline.com. Packets 4, 5 and 6 will be available very soon.



KMCI's FLORR and Parenting Programs

The Father's Love of Reading Relationships Program at Kettle Moraine Correctional Institution (Wisconsin) has grown this year. We are an 11-week program for fathers who want to learn to build stronger relationships with their children. Local libraries and book stores have donated some current, brightly colored children's books to our program. We have moved from audio taping two books read by the fathers to DVD taping of two books read by the fathers. The program now includes the four videos in the *Parenting from Prison* series. These videos qualify the participants for completion signatures in the re-entry portfolio required by the Wisconsin DOC. We are refining the program to accommodate all of these changes.

Parenting instruction at KMCI has also changed this year. Our parenting teacher of many years retired. The Re-entry Program fosters acquisition of better parenting skills which positively affects our inmates and their families. We adopted the *Inside /Out Dads* Parenting Program as the core material in our curriculum. With that program we show the *Family Reunification* and *Parenting from Prison* video series. The *Family in Focus* packets help round out discussion sessions. We cover topics of how people develop parenting styles, what is masculinity, spirituality, anger management, self-esteem, communications, discipline vs. punishment, child development, age appropriate expectations, family meetings, goal setting, reentry planning, and a fathering plan. My class is run as a discussion group with some role play. Role play is important to assist participants in changing their habits and patterns of thinking.

submitted by Mary Pohlman, KMCI



Class Aims to Help Children of Inmates

When a parent is sentenced to prison, it can be hard time for their children too.

Angel Clark, a Cardinal Stritch University instructor, wants to change that. Clark recently led a continuing education class for teachers called "Incarceration: Impacting Schools and Families." The purpose of the two-day class was to provide teachers with tools to help students who have an incarcerated parent.

"I want to connect schools with the prison, the incarcerated parent and their families by focusing on what is best for the child and what the child needs to succeed in school and life," Clark said.

Clark, who earned her master's degree in special education from Edgewood College in 1998, said the course evolved from a Grief, Loss and Recovery class she also teaches through Cardinal Stritch. "After researching and learning how little attention is given to support those families with incarcerated parents, I decided to take action and create a class for educators," Clark said.

Clark teamed up with Fox Lake Correctional Institution (Wisconsin) employees Dan Zanon, a vocational teacher, and Chris Krueger, Social Service director, to organize a panel discussion between inmates, their spouses and FLCI officials.

Twenty educators met at St. Katherine Drexel School on Nov. 7 to discuss background information about prisons and prepare for the visit to FLCI. The next day, the class journeyed through the metal detectors of FLCI for the panel discussion and a tour of the facility.

"One message I would like everyone to know is that these children of the incarcerated are just like any other child. They are not damaged goods," Warden Jodine Deppisch told the educators.

Although children of inmates are not "damaged goods," statistics show that they are at a disadvantage. Children who have an incarcerated parent are six times more likely to be incarcerated in the future — and today there are more than 2 million children who have incarcerated parents, according to the U.S. Bureau of Prisons.

The panel discussion focused on the financial and emotional hardships these families face. "We discussed ways to lighten the load for these single parents, such as being flexible toward homework and getting involved beyond the classroom," Clark said. "We know that children of the incarcerated can accomplish just as much, if not more, than any other child. What they need is a positive, non-judgmental adult role model to believe in them."

The class was an eye-opening experience for Marcia Paul, a vocal music teacher at Beaver Dam High School. "I hadn't realized how much the criminal's family could be victimized. One of the strongest realizations that came out of the experience was that sometimes incarceration is a much bigger punishment to the family than it is to the offender," Paul said. "Whenever a parent is under insurmountable pressure, the children are as well."

To emphasize the importance of the class, Clark cited studies that show family support during and after incarceration is critical for rehabilitation and re-entry into society. "Rehabilitation is also critical for family survival. Many people may not realize this fact: Only death causes more stress on a family. Yet there is very little help both emotionally and financially for these families," Clark said.

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Clark noted that families with an incarcerated parent face many of the same burdens as other single-parent households, however, the social stigma of incarceration evokes more stress for children. "In a society where so much emphasis is placed upon image, and a family's social status is most often determined by the father's job, children of convicted felons are facing a distinct disadvantage. We can assume that many of these children have a negative self-image without a positive role model," she said.

The stress related to an incarcerated parent touches every aspect of a child's life, especially school. "When someone is grieving, one of the symptoms is an inability to concentrate," Clark said.

A quick glance at statistics reveals that prison populations have expanded from 200,000 inmates in the 1970s to more than 2.2 million people today, according to the U.S. Prison Bureau. Clark said expanding prison populations have forced many educators to ask themselves how to deal with a child who announces to the class that mom or dad is prison. Teachers are also left contemplating how involved they should be with the children's home life.

"This is very frustrating to educators who want to help, but are either afraid to or simply don't know what to do. They are frustrated because they cannot teach a child who cannot concentrate because he or she is so grief stricken and pre-occupied with worries of what is happening at home or what will happen to them now that their family dynamics are changing," Clark said.

Clark hopes to continue and expand the Incarceration: Impacting Schools and Families class to provide educators with tools to help children of inmates overcome their disadvantages and live up to their full potential.

by: Aaron Martin
Capital Newspapers, *Beaver Dam (Wisconsin) Daily Citizen*





One of the goals of the University of Wisconsin-Extension is to provide education that strengthens Wisconsin's families. UW-Extension Family Living Programs respond to community needs with research-based education and partnerships that support Wisconsin families and communities.

Family Living Programs target:

- **Families and Communities** - Creating strong families that serve as the foundation for community life by enhancing family relationships, parenting, child development and the community institutions that promote family well-being.
- **Food and Nutrition** - Promoting healthy, well-nourished families as they learn to manage food dollars, plan nutritious meals, and purchase, prepare, and serve food that is safe to eat.
- **Family Economics** - Helping families meet future needs while keeping pace with day-to-day expenses and addressing the basics of earning, spending, saving, investing, health care, and housing issues.

Among the ways the UW-Extension uses to provide information to families throughout the state and nation are the maintenance of a website and the publication of a series of newsletters. The newsletters, lesson sheets, and fact sheets described below may be accessed at www.uwex.edu/ces/flp.parenting .

The UW-Extension Family Living Programs are convinced that, "Parents really do better when they read these newsletters!"

The Parenting newsletters published by UW-Extension Family Living Program are:

Preparing to Parent

You're going to have a baby! UW-Extension Family Living Program's four newsletters cover each trimester of pregnancy, and help you prepare for birth and beyond. UW-Extension Family Living Program's aim is the same as yours: a healthy mother and baby, and you becoming the best parent you can be.

Parenting the First Year

Becoming a parent is an exciting change in your life. But it can be a stressful and trying time too. In this set of 12 newsletters, find out from child development experts how your baby changes during each month of the first year. Get the latest information on child development, nutrition, health, safety, child care, changes in family life, and much more. Revised in 2006, the newsletters include new articles on if baby is premature, routines for baby, and separation distress, as well as updates on feeding, where baby sleeps, immunizations, and more.



Parenting the Second and Third Year

Being a parent gets more exciting as your toddler learns to talk, play with you and others, and make decisions. Your toddler's curiosity will delight you, as well as frustrate and tire you.

In this set of 12 newsletters, find out from child development experts how your toddler changes during each two months of the second and third years. Guiding and caring for your child these next two years will take a lot of your attention, encouragement, patience, humor – and a sense of wonder.

Get the latest information on child development, child guidance, language development, children and television, nutrition, health, safety, child care, taking care of yourself, and much more. These newsletters were revised in 2006, with articles from creating fun play and learning activities to preventing poisoning from lead paint around your home and yard.

Parenting the Preschooler

Parenting the Preschooler is a newsletter designed for parents and caregivers of preschool age children. The goals are to enhance the parent/caregiver-child relationship, increase parent/caregiver confidence and reduce parent/caregiver stress.

Information is provided on discipline, food and nutrition, finances, health and safety, nurturing and love, parent support, personality styles, play activities, school readiness, and social interactions.

Parenting Future Readers

Learning to read is one of those goals that all parents share for their children, and well it should be. Early reading ability is one of the key predictors of how children will succeed in their later schooling and life. And while schools and child care programs can have a big effect on the development of literacy, families still have the biggest impact. Research of the last two decades provides useful advice for parents who want to promote their young children's language and literacy development. *Parenting Future Readers* translates that advice into easy explanations and activities for parents. For instance, they tell parents about the importance of talking with and reading to their children, as well as creating print-rich home environments. UW-Extensions *Parenting Future Readers*, new in 2003, are 12 age-paced fliers for parents of children ages zero to three. These newsletters are also available in Spanish.

Parenting Your Unique Child

Every child is born with his/her own unique temperament or style of behavior. A child's temperament is made up of a number of different traits such as sensitivity, intensity, activity level, and adaptability. Temperament affects how children react to their world and how parents respond to their children. Research shows that parents who understand their child's temperament feel better about their child and have an easier time handling behaviors that are challenging, but normal for their child. *Parenting Your Unique Child* describes what temperament is, how parents can find out their child's temperament, and useful strategies for handling different temperament styles. Parents also learn things like what preschool fits best with different temperaments, and how sibling rivalry is influenced by children's temperament. UW-Extensions' *Parenting Your Unique Child*, new in 2004, is a set of 12 age-paced fliers for parents of children ages zero to three.

Also available on the UW-Extension Family Living Programs' website is a set of 13 lesson sheets to help families determine when children are ready for self-care and teach safe self-care skills to school-age children home alone.



Family Keys: Teaching Self-Care Skills to Our Children

Titles include:

- Ready for Self-Care
- What Are the Family Rules?
- Tips for Parents on Teaching Your Children
- Phone Skills
- First Aid
- Interpersonal Safety
- Safe at Home
- Fear, Loneliness, and Boredom
- Getting Along with Others
- Fire Safety
- Kitchen and Food Safety
- Nutritious Snacks
- Strong Families – Confident Safe Children
- Tips for Using Family Keys

The UW-Extension Family Living Programs' has information on its website for *Grandparents Raising Grandchildren*.

Through the Eyes of a Child

If you're a grandparent raising your grandchild, you have an important responsibility. The child you are raising faces unique challenges that you need to think about. This series of nine fact sheets is designed to help you learn more about what to expect and where to turn for support.

This series is tailored specifically for grandparents raising young children (birth to age 8). The focus is on family relationships and child development rather than legal or financial issues. Topics include understanding children's behaviors, the importance of close relationships and open communication, and maintaining contact with parents.

Grandparents Raising Grandchildren was developed by specialists at the University of Wisconsin-Madison and University of Wisconsin-Extension with feedback from grandparents and experts in the field. Beautiful color drawings by young artists help bring the series to life.

A promotional flyer is available to help organizations promote the *Through the Eyes of a Child-Grandparents Raising Grandchildren* fact sheet series.

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Check out the Parenting Special Interest Group Discussion Forum at www.ceanational.org



Youth Initiatives E-Newsletter

The Wisconsin Council on Children and Families publishes a *Youth Initiatives* e-newsletter, edited by Wendy Paget Henderson.

The November 25, 2008 issue focuses on juvenile justice topics.

Included in this issue are articles on:

- **The Future of Children: An Issue Devoted to Juvenile Justice**
- **New Report from the Justice Policy Institute on Juvenile Sex Offender Registries**
- **Welcome to Wisconsin Budget Season!**
- **High Risk Juvenile Offender Committee Update**
- **Workplace Giving Time: Support WCCF**

Anyone interested in signing up for the *Youth Initiatives* e-newsletter or other WCCF mailing lists may go to <http://capwiz.com/wccf/mlm/signup/>.

For more information about the Wisconsin Council on Children and Families contact Wendy Paget Henderson at whenderson@wccf.org.

Wanted: Presenters

Since its birth, CEA's Parenting Special Interest Group sought to spread the word regarding the importance of providing Parenting programs in corrections. The Parenting SIG has encouraged Parenting instructors to conduct workshops on their programs at state, regional, and national conferences.

2009 offers two excellent opportunities to share information on your program. The Region III & IV CEA Conference will be held in Ames, Iowa on May 6-8, 2009 and the 64th Annual CEA Conference will be held in Madison, Wisconsin on July 19-21, 2009.

You are encouraged to present a workshop on your Parenting class, Parent Support Group, Parent/Child Literacy program, or Parents' Fair at either of these conferences.

For more information about the Region III & IV CEA Conference, contact Carol Magoon at cmagoon@dhs.state.ia.us.

To present at the 64th Annual CEA Conference, go to the www.ceanational.org website or contact Barbara Wulfers at barbara.wulfers@wisconsin.gov.

If you have any questions about presenting at either of these conferences or need more information or suggestions contact Mary Knox at mary.knox@wisconsin.gov or Jerry Bednarowski at jerrybednarowski@new.rr.com





Resources for Brain Development Research and Study

The following is a list of resources for instructors interested in doing some research on interesting facts about brain development. These sites can be found on the Wisconsin Council on Children & Families website under Brain Project. Every month they feature a new site and have an archive of old sites.

There is a wealth of great things to read and handouts to copy.

"Zero to Three" and "BrainWonders" - In and of itself, the *Zero to Three* website is a terrific resource for parents, students, and instructors. If you are looking for information on brain development, you will want to go directly to the "Brain Wonders" section. You will find information designed for parents, childcare providers, and physicians, but, in fact, the information in all areas is useful and understandable for anyone.

<http://www.zerotothree.org>

<http://www.zerotothree.org/brainwonders/>

"Neuroscience for Kids" - Professor Chudler, University of Washington, has created a site for students and teachers to learn about the nervous system. This interactive site has many activities and a wealth of information at your fingertips.

<http://faculty.washington.edu/chudler/neurok.html>

"Brain Rules" - What's a Brain Rule? It's one thing scientists know for sure about how our brain works. Don't miss this website – there are some great video clips, links, etc. This is one you **MUST** check out!

<http://www.brainrules.net/>

"The Science Daily" - We must have been sleeping at the switch to have missed this site. Information on all facets of brain research! The topic choices are located in the left panel on the home page. I just found a good article on prenatal exposure to drugs, alcohol, & tobacco. Explore & have fun! Great Site!!

http://www.sciencedaily.com/news/mind_brain/

"The Society of Neuroscience" - Time to revisit one of the best sites out there! Check out ALL of the publications mentioned on the bottom of the Home Page. Especially good are Brain Briefings, Brain Facts, Neuroscience Nexus, and Neuroscience Quarterly. For the latest news from many sources, check out "Neuroscience in the News" under "Quick Links" in the right margin. **HAPPY READING!**

<http://www.sfn.org/>

submitted by: Mary K. Knox
Wisconsin Resource Center

For old issues of the *Parenting Connection* newsletter, go to www.ceawisconsin.org



Editorial:

Happy New Year! There are so many things to look forward to in 2009. Wisconsin is hosting the International CEA conference this summer in Madison. Our whole department is scheduled to go and we are looking forward to having a wonderful time. I will be looking for all of you there as well.

In November I was fortunate enough to attend the Adolescent Brain Development training "Unlocking the Mysteries" held at the DOC central office in Madison. This two day training sponsored by the Wisconsin Council on Children & Families' Brain Team was unbelievable. Every segment of Brain Development offered by the Brain Team has been unbelievable. I always leave with my head filled with so many facts and ideas of how to incorporate this knowledge into my parenting classes. This presentation had me thinking of not only the fathers I present to, but also my past parenting with my own teenagers. Mentally, I was evaluating past decisions concerning what the healthy risks and the unhealthy risks my teens were taking. Whew..... We made it through those years with minimal problems. The two days reinforced the idea we sometimes have that just when we think it is OK to let up on some of supervision and monitoring of our older children, we cannot. The pre-frontal cortex is not fully mature until age 25 and those teens need our support and limits. The Council is lobbying for the juvenile laws to be changed so that no teen under 18 yrs is ever waived into adult court. They have the research to back up this change.

I look forward to hearing from you in 2009. Send me your news so I can include it in the coming newsletters.

Mary K. Knox

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