

Parenting Connection

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Come On People Begins the Dialogue

This Spring, CEA Executive Director Steve Steurer announced that Bill Cosby agreed to donate 10,000 copies of his book *Come On People* to the Correctional Education Association to distribute to the nation's adult prison inmates. All participants at the 64th Annual CEA Conference held in Madison, Wisconsin on July 19-22, 2009 also received a copy of the book.

In their book, [*Come On People: On the Path from Victims to Victors*](#), Dr. Bill Cosby and Dr. Alvin F. Poussaint, M.D., address "What's Going on with Black Men" and then go on to discuss the social ills of a people, looking both at individual responsibility and cultural influences.

In *Come On People*, the authors provide their honest critique of all that is wrong with Black youth and the Black community in general. Their book provides a mix of social analysis, tough love and up-by-the-bootstraps advice. The problems faced by Black youth are many: poverty, low education, shortage of role models, violence, hyper-incarceration, self-hate, breakdown of community, mental health problems, shorter life expectancies, etc. Many children are being ignored. And those who are in, of and from the Black community become angry over what is taking place. The authors caution against allowing this anger to translate into a blame game, and victims should not become the scapegoats.

Cosby and Poussaint believe, "For the last generation or two, as our communities dissolved and our parenting skills broke down, no one has suffered more than our young black men. We have been around long enough and traveled widely enough to understand something about the problem. And we're hopeful enough--or desperate enough--to think that with all of us working together we might find a solution"

In addressing these problems the authors give advice starting with the community, and then go on to discuss what can really help children.

INSIDE THIS ISSUE

- 1-2 *Come on People* Begins the Dialogue
- 3 64th Annual CEA Conference Parenting Workshops
- 4-5 Parenting Styles - Negative or Overly Active
- 5 President Obama's Fatherhood Speech
- 6-7 Preparing for Release by Rebuilding Families
- 8 Parenting SIG Report - June 2009
- 8 Share Your Parent/Child Literacy Program
- 9 New Editors Assume Duties
- 10 Editorial

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In the chapter, "We All Start Out As Children," Cosby and Poussaint comment on good parenting techniques at each stage of development from infancy to the teen years. When discussing discipline, the authors reject corporal punishment and offer other more effective parenting strategies, emphasizing the that structure and predictable rules can help children.

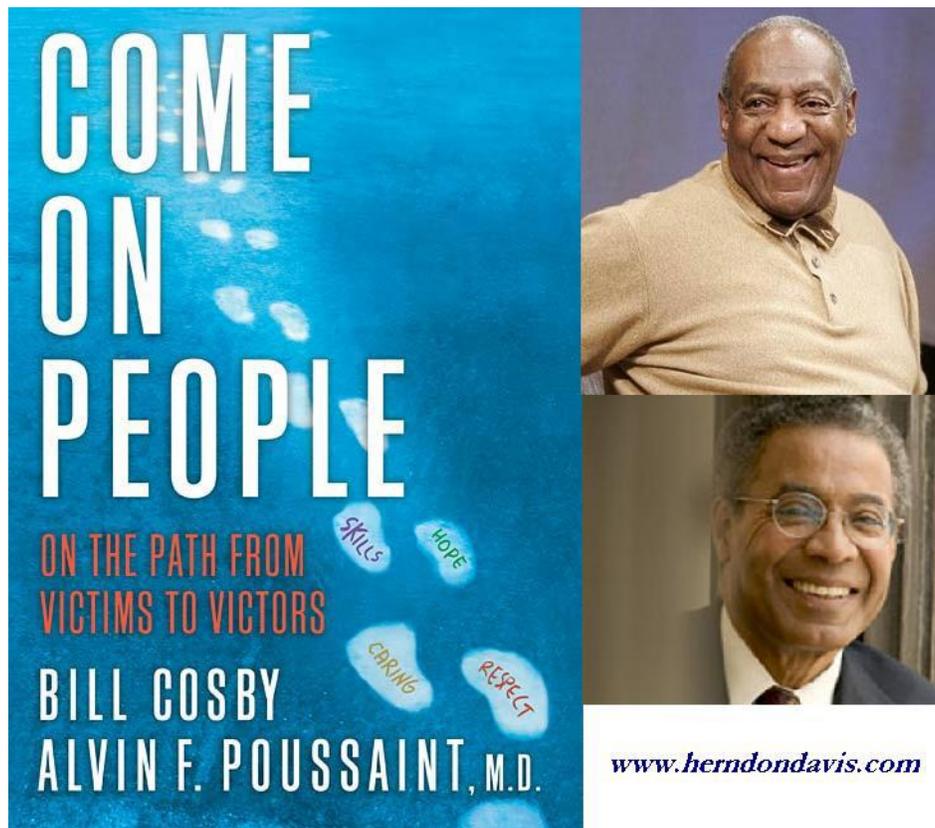
In the chapter "Teach Your Children Well," Cosby and Poussaint discuss tools parents should use to help their children by inspiring them, keeping them in school, keeping the faith, and keeping them out of prison.

Dr. Cosby and Dr. Poussaint speak of the plight of black men in society explaining the changes in their roles since the 1950s. They describe how the strength of the family has diminished and how black youth had a respect for their father and though may be tempted to do bad, wouldn't because being caught would shame their mom.

The two authors site statistics. Much is linked to the breakdown of family and community ... more to fewer opportunities and the loss of the English language. A justice system that disfavors black males also adds to the problem.

The self-help and community-based solutions which Cosby and Poussaint advocate in this book are but one part of the puzzle. They give sound advice on many issues, including the crisis of Black men, violence in the home, parent involvement in the education of their children, community-based job creation and entrepreneurship, and improving neighborhoods.

Come On People is recommended reading, not because it provides solutions to all of Black peoples' woes -- perhaps no book can accomplish so much. However, the book is important in that it begins the dialogue concerning the crisis plaguing the African American community.



64th Annual CEA Conference

Parenting Workshops

Correctional educators and administrators from throughout the nation will be gathering to learn about innovative programs, educational resources, and teaching strategies that are being implemented in prisons, jails, and juvenile facilities.

This year's conference will feature six workshops that are specifically designed for Parenting instructors. If you are in the progress of starting a new program or expanding existing educational services, take advantage of this opportunity and find some information that will be useful to you.

Here are descriptions of the workshops of primary interest to Parenting instructors:

Bridging the Gap between Incarcerated Parents and Their Kids Through Books

Book-sharing is a wonderful tool to help make/maintain family connections for incarcerated parents and also a great way to increase reading and writing skills. Connect with your "inner child" during this interactive workshop that discusses how Fatheread® and book-sharing can be used to promote both family connections and literacy skills.

From the Inside/Out: Taking Personal Responsibility for Relationships in Your Life

Experience is where our personal data comes from. Inmates who take part in the program will always be looking back and thinking forward to a life that is better. This presentation will help instructors of Parenting to bring to their students a new method of change to become masters of a new life. Their students will learn that they don't have to be victims of their past, assuming they take personal responsibility for their life and are willing to change and move forward.

How to End the Plight of Our Women Who Go Missing Because of Domestic Violence

My adult daughter went missing in 2003 and is believed to have been murdered by her boyfriend. I have since worked with the media, private investigators, state legislators and police to bring attention to the deadly cycle of domestic abuse. My presentation communicates the impact of domestic violence and my story has been powerfully received by inmates, women's shelters, universities and civic organizations.

Using Infant Simulators to Teach Infant Care Skills and Related Infant Topics

This hands-on workshop demonstrates and gives ideas for using infant simulators to discuss empathy and nurturing – characteristics needed by caregivers, and to teach basic infant care. It also includes information on specific infant simulators to teach about shaken baby syndrome, prenatal alcohol exposure, and prenatal drug exposure.

Using Tunes to Tell a Child's Story

The technique that will be presented will use music, focusing on a child's experiences with his or her father. Through the use of music, participants will identify the negative and positive effects of being involved in a child's life. This exercise forces the fathers to make decisions and develop a plan that identifies steps to change their ways and build a purposeful legacy for their children.

Snowmen and Birthday Parties!! Part of the Day Long Visit for Inmate Mothers and Their Children

This workshop offers an explanation of a unique program for inmate mothers and their children. Taycheedah Correctional Institution, a maximum/medium female prison facility in Wisconsin, provides opportunities for extended visitation in a home-like setting where inmates and their children can interact, grow, and bond in a healthy and constructive manner. Discussion of preparation, criteria, and success of the program will be offered.



Parenting Styles – Negative or Overly Active

In a study, *Parenting Styles of African American and White Families with Young Children: Findings from an Observational Study*, posted on the All Academic Research, Inc. website, researchers Kyle Longest, Lorraine Taylor, Melissa Barnett, and C. Raver examined variables that affect parent-child interactions.

In-home visits featuring a structured parent-child interaction task were used to identify parenting behaviors. Mothers and their children involved in the task of making play-dough were videotaped and analyzed by the research team.

Variation in parenting behaviors in relation to demographic and family type variables such as mother's race, income, education, marital status, household characteristics, and child gender were explored. Data were collected from a sample of 163 low-income Head Start eligible families, with a target child age 3.8 to 4.6 years. Families were from 8 Head Start sites in two upstate New York communities. The mothers self identified as 49% African American and 40% white. Fifty-three percent of the mothers were currently working and 52% were married or cohabitating. The average family income was \$17,568. More than a third of the participants reported being on welfare at sometime during the past year.

Parenting behaviors were analyzed using these scales:

- Positive affect scale - captures the level of warmth and compassion expressed by the parent during the task
- Responsiveness scale - measures the degree to which the parent is aware of and responsive to the child's bids, signals, needs and abilities
- Positive control/directiveness code - indicates the extent to which the parent uses control strategies that are non-coercive, child-focused and appropriate for the task
- Negative control/restrictiveness - taps the extent to which a parent uses strategies for control that are parent-focused, harsh, coercive or punitive
- Disengagement/detachment scale - describes the degree to which the parent is emotionally distant, uninvolved or unaware of the child's signals or needs
- Hostility scale - captures the extent to which the parent expresses anger, frustration, contempt and rejection towards the child
- Cognitive stimulation code - measures the extent to which the parent attempts to promote the child's cognitive development through the use of age-appropriate strategies to foster the child's cognitive, verbal and perceptual development.
- Emotional stimulation code - taps the extent to which the parent promotes the child's emotional development during the interaction

These individually coded measures were then combined into four encompassing behavior styles: Positivity, Negativity, Stimulation, and Detachment.

Study results showed that the only demographic and family type variables that were significant predictors of any of the four parenting styles were income, relationship status, and race:

- Being in the highest income category increases the likelihood of being at or above the mean on positivity and decreases this likelihood for detachment.
- Cohabiting mothers, compared to those that are married, are significantly more likely to be at or above the mean in terms of negativity, while they are significantly less likely to be at or above the mean in their positivity or stimulation behaviors.



- African Americans are half as likely as whites to be at or above the mean on positivity, but are over twice as likely to be at or above the mean on both negativity and detachment.
- Mothers with a female child are less likely to display higher levels of negativity than those with a male child.

Looking at the variables in relation to each other suggests that the association of race with negativity is connected to child gender. While African Americans are more likely than whites to utilize negatively directed parenting behaviors overall, most of this difference stems from their increased use of these types of behaviors with their male children. The study showed that both African American and white mothers treat their girls relatively similarly.

Part of the reason results show African Americans use higher levels of negativity is that with boys, African American mothers often combine this negativity with high levels of positivity and stimulation, making for an extremely active parenting style.

The *Parenting Styles of African American and White Families with Young Children* study makes no judgment as to which parenting styles are harmful or helpful to the developing child. Although it is generally perceived that higher levels of negativity and detachment are harmful, this conclusion may not be warranted when parenting behaviors are taken as whole. Analysis revealed that what is at least partially creating the observed high levels of negativity amongst African American mothers with male children is their greater use of a more overall active parenting style.

The question of which style is more advantageous for child development is an important topic for future research. It is important to look at differences in parenting practices used amongst ethnic sub-groups as adaptive strategies, rather than deficits. The higher levels of certain parenting behaviors used by African American mothers may be due to their awareness of the many potential dangers facing African American males, leading them to be more highly active in managing their sons both through negative and positive control measures.

President Obama's Fatherhood Speech

On Father's Day weekend I heard a wonderful speech on the news given by President Obama exhorting fathers to step up to the plate and become responsible for their children. My students were very attentive to his message when I brought it back to the classroom.

His message to men was, "We need them to realize that what makes you a man is not the ability to have a child---it's the courage to raise one."

President Obama talks about the difficult time women have when they are raising children alone. He tells the fathers that they need to inspire an ethic of excellence in their children. Then he asks that they pass along the value of empathy to their children.

Obama tells the fathers, "We pass on the values of empathy and kindness to our children by living them. We need to show our kids that you're not strong by putting other people down—you're strong by lifting them up." He closes the speech with the message that we must all do our part to leave all children a better world.

The printed copy I found on the internet was dated June 15, 2008 but it was just as good the second time around.



Preparing for Release by Rebuilding Families

Ten plus years after I resigned my position as a parenting and family educator inside adult prisons, I went back inside to help inmates and their families prepare for release. I am one of several trained facilitators volunteering in the **Preparing for Release** program developed in cooperation with Washington State's Department of Corrections.

Rebuilding Families, Inc., the volunteer group with whom I work, sponsors and facilitates the program inside the state's three women's prisons. The program is presented in four sessions over two week-ends. Its intensity leaves me exhausted and exhilarated.

The women eligible to participate in Preparing for Release are nearing their release dates, have family members who are willing to help them with the reentry process and are ready to make realistic choices for their own futures. Some of them were acquainted with the Rebuilding Families organization and had applied for the association's assistance in the physical transition from prison to community.

The first session, a Friday afternoon, involved only offenders and volunteer facilitators. We spent some time becoming comfortable in our respective teacher/student roles (for that is what they are) and discussing why offenders need to prepare for release. The student manual opens with a pretest that directs thinking and reasoning, and facilitates interaction.

Reuniting with family members after long separations is an emotional experience. Students started lists of their expectations (or hopes) and concerns (or fears). They knew their family members would complete similar exercises in the early part of the second session. That helped us segue to communication skills, how messages get garbled, and how to practice effective communication in families. Most of us have some level of dysfunction in our families. In the short time we'd been together as teachers and students, we'd become comfortable enough to do some self-disclosure.

The second session covers an entire Saturday. Our students arrived first and endured a recap of the Friday afternoon session while they awaited the arrival of their family members. They would have a few moments for greetings and an opportunity to get a bite of snacks set out for the families. Then they separated for the morning. At least one volunteer facilitator worked with the students on roles and rules, expectations and behaviors, while two or more coached family members in preparation for the afternoon.

After lunch together, offender students and their families came together to share what they'd learned, discuss their communication styles and begin preparing for a Family Re-entry agreement. Volunteer facilitator's became negotiators, coaches or an extra pair of ears to listen to hopes and dreams, concerns and fears. We clarified, offered information about community resources and intervened only when invited. We had several boxes of tissues placed throughout the room. We knew there would be emotional moments.

At the end of the second session, offenders and their family members agreed to spend the next two weeks thinking and writing about the work they'd accomplished to that point. During that interval, one offender's mother called our lead facilitator to say she wouldn't be back. She didn't trust her daughter enough to let her move back home.

The third session, again a Friday afternoon, examines personal and family roles, and the likelihood some of them have changed. My 18 years as a parenting and family educator proved helpful during this session. We discussed many positive roles and some that are less admirable. Some of the women admitted to being



manipulators, a behavior that is often part of drug abuse. One woman said, "I'm a criminal, a thug." We helped her look at her other roles. She was reaching the end of a long sentence; she appreciated discovering several more desirable behaviors she's learned during the last few years.

Old behaviors can change, though it requires determination. Being willing to change, or choosing to change, is the first step. We worked on establishing limits and boundaries, discussing them within the family unit, and accepting those other family members adopt as part of the re-entry plan. We'd reached the point where students started a list of adjustments they realized they would have to make when they walked out of the prison gates.

Nerves dominated the fourth session and final session, the Saturday when offenders met with one facilitator and families with another to prioritize their re-entry activities. Many on both sides noted that the offender needed to stay clean and sober. That meant attending AA or NA meetings, possibly daily for 90 days. Offenders needed to know if they could expect financial support while they searched for work, and how soon the family expected them to get a job. Family members noted that the offender needed to take all prescribed medications as directed.

Children are a major issue in negotiated agreements. Our offender students who had young children still had some work to do to prepare for reuniting with their children. Those who had the benefit of parent education while incarcerated were more aware of the challenges awaiting them.

When we all came together on Saturday afternoon to finalize the Re-entry Agreement form, some families requested a facilitator's presence. Others were ready to work on their own. I spent an hour with one couple who had some major unresolved issues. My role was mediator, a skill I'd trained for somewhere during my correctional education career. The couple wanted to resume life together, but they had many hurdles left. They'd avoided discussing the difficult issues when he visited her inside prison. They both found it easier to tell me their concerns and let me restate what I heard. By the end of our private hour, some tears were shed, some agreements were reached, and some issues were left on the table, in the open now, for further discussion. They are Preparing for Release.

More information about Preparing for Release is available at info@preparingforrelease.com. For some female offender specific information, contact Jan walker at janwalker@centurytel.net.

Rebuilding Families, Inc., is a nonprofit that assists Washington state female offenders with their transition back into the community and reunification with their families. www.rebuildingfamilies.org.

by: Jan Walker
Gig Harbor, Washington



Parenting SIG Report – June 2009

In June, each of CEA's Special Interest Groups is asked to submit its annual report to the Chair of the Presidents' Council. Since last year's report, the membership on the Parenting SIG email list has declined slightly to 137 Parenting SIG members from 24 states and one foreign country.

The Parenting membership remains broad in its scope; including correctional educators, other staff, and volunteers who are involved in teaching Parenting classes, facilitating Fathers'/Mothers' Support Groups, supervising Parent/Child Book Projects, coordinating Parent Fairs, or promoting positive parenting skills in some other way.

A noteworthy initiative in which the Parenting SIG played a minor role was working with CEA Executive Director Steve Steurer to secure a donation of books co-authored by Dr. Bill Cosby and Dr. Alvin Poussaint. The Parenting SIG provided information about Parenting projects in corrections which was forwarded to Drs. Cosby and Poussaint. As a result of Steve's efforts, 10,000 copies of the book *Come On People* were distributed by CEA to the nation's adult prison schools and libraries.

The Parenting SIG continues to publish a bi-monthly *Parenting Connections* newsletter. To date 28 issues have been published. Each issue is emailed to approximate 184 correctional educators and administrators and mailed to 125.

The Parenting SIG's *Guide to Successful Parenting Programs in Corrections* has continued to be updated. It now contains the outlines of 54 programs from 5 states.

Information continues to be posted on the *Parenting SIG Discussion Forum*. Since last year's report, 13 more postings have been added, bringing the total to 29. As of June 8, the postings have been viewed 13,090 times.

The Parenting SIG continues to encourage educators to spread the word regarding the importance of providing Parenting programming. The Parenting SIG has encouraged Parenting instructors to conduct over a dozen workshops on their programs at CEA, education, and correctional conferences. This year, three workshops related to Parenting topics were presented at the 2008 CEA Annual Conference in Denver and one was presented at the 2009 Region III & IV CEA Conference in Ames, Iowa.

If you know of any correctional educator who is involved with Parenting Classes, Parent Support Groups, Parent/Child Literacy Programs or Parent Fairs; have them contact jerrybednarowski@new.rr.com to join the Parenting SIG.

Share Your Parent/Child Literacy Program

Again this year, CEA-Wisconsin will be teaming with the Wisconsin Technical College System and Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction to plan workshops for the Wisconsin GED/HSED & Adult Literacy Conference to be held at the Paper Valley Hotel in Appleton on November 10-12, 2009. If you would like to present a workshop on your parent/child literacy program, contact Program Committee member: Jerry Bednarowski at jerrybednarowski@new.rr.com



New Editors Assume Duties

As is the procedure for this newsletter, each July a new editor for the *Parenting Connection* assumes her/his duties. Beginning with this issue, Mary Pohlman will be the new editor.

Volunteering to be the new co-editor is Cheri Wontor who teaches at Milwaukee Secure Detention Facility. She will replace Mary Pohlman as editor when her term expires in July 2010.

Mary Pohlman is the fourth person to act as editor of the *Parenting Connection*. Diane Birch, a teacher at Stanley Correctional Institution, was the newsletter's first editor. She was followed by Mary Dahl, a teacher at Green Bay Correctional Institution, and Mary Knox, a teacher at Wisconsin Resource Center.

Mary Pohlman

Mary is a lifelong learner who has a Bachelors Degree from Lakeland College (Wisconsin) in Psychology. A Masters in Educational Psychology from Marquette University seemed like the next logical step. Eventually, Mary decided that she wanted to teach, so she earned certification in Special Education-Emotional Behavioral Disorders and Specific Learning Disabilities from the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee along with another 30 graduate credits.

Mary began working in the schools in 1995 as a teacher's aid. She worked as a licensed substitute teacher until 2002. While certifying, she worked in inner city schools in Milwaukee. She also taught for 3 semesters at St. Aemilian's-Lakeside in Milwaukee. Then Mary spent a year working in the Sheboygan School District. All her experiences were with special education, usually middle school students who were identified with Emotional Behavior Disorder and Mental Illnesses. Mary's current position with the Wisconsin Department of Corrections began 2 ¾ years ago. Initially she was an ABE-Science teacher, but quickly became a special education teacher.

Mary's hobbies include puttering around a slightly dilapidated house she purchased. She also gardens, has a couple dogs, works on some "needle work" and reads.

Cherlyn Wontor

Cheri Wontor teaches Adult Basic Education at the Milwaukee Secure Detention Facility. Her keen interest in Parenting is to share with the inmates her life and educational experiences in that area.

As an Adult Instructor, the main goal of Cheri's program is to give the inmate students transitional tools to become effective as both a parent and as well a good citizen upon their release.

Cheri's background includes teaching in the Mequon-Thiensville School District as a special education teacher on the elementary level as well as an instructor over ten years at Milwaukee Area Technical College and Concordia University in the Business Divisions. Presently, Cheri is completing her Master's Degree in Reading at Concordia University.

If you would like to submit an article for the next issue of the *Parenting Connection*, you may send it to Mary Pohlman at mary.pohlman@wisconsin.gov or Cheri Wontor at cherlyn.wontor@wisconsin.gov.

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



Editorial - Mary Pohlman

The Latest Crazy Editor

Somehow I found my self volunteering for this very “rewarding” position over a year ago. At that time, July of 2009 seemed too far away to contemplate. Now I am scrambling just as the past editors did to fill our newsletter with articles that we can use in our parenting classes. After reading reflection papers by men who have not had a male role model in their lives, I looked for material that would help them with day to day family management. This material used in conjunction with Parenting from Prison and Focus on Families works well for me.

Over the next year I will share some of this material with you. At the same time I would appreciate hearing from you, both in reference to what I share and to what you could share with the Parenting Special Interest Group members.

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