

PARENT EDUCATION A CORNERSTONE OF CHILD ABUSE PREVENTION

In the latest in the series of Issues Papers produced by the National Child Protection Clearing House, based at the Australian Institute of Family Studies, Clearing House Research Advisor Adam Tomison provides a detailed assessment of the field of parent education.

Valuing Parent Education provides an overview of parent education, and the various forms it may take, in conjunction with a summary of what is known about the effectiveness of parent education interventions and the role of parent education within a holistic framework of child abuse prevention.

Parent education is a strategy commonly used to assist parents to maintain an adequate standard of parenting by providing parents with information about the challenges of parenting and the skills they need to parent effectively, and by enhancing their access to social supports. Parent education has also become a cornerstone for working with 'at risk' and maltreating families to reduce the likelihood of child abuse and neglect. As such, it is currently advocated as a significant component of any comprehensive set of preventative services for parents at high risk of abusing or neglecting their children.

In the last decade parent education has become a pervasive form of education and training for parents, encapsulating a multitude of community education and parent training initiatives which operate across the spectrum of child abuse prevention. Parent education programs appear



Picture: Andrew Chapman

able to provide families with skills and knowledge of parenting and child development and thus go part of the way towards setting some basic standards of adequate parenting. Evidence suggests that initiatives are undergoing continual modification and adaptation to meet the changing needs of diverse communities.

However, like much of the child abuse prevention field, little empirical evidence has been collected to define adequately the effects of parent education on parents and children, or which specific strategies and programs are most effective. In spite of a clear effort by service providers (and researchers) to improve the quality of their program evaluations, the nature and demands of in situ programs like those of

parent education and child abuse prevention programs in general has meant that the task of developing rigorous experimental evaluations is a difficult one.

What is apparent from the research and practice literature is that the present popularity of parent education has led some to perceive parent education programs as a panacea for child maltreatment.

Tomison concludes, however, that it is naive to expect that parent education, and parenting skills courses in particular, even when tailored to the needs of individual 'at risk' and maltreating families, can overcome the various situational pressures which may affect families. He concludes that it is only by adopting a comprehensive

approach to child abuse prevention and inappropriate parenting, that family issues are dealt with and child maltreatment is most likely to be prevented.

Parent education in all its forms is a cornerstone of such a framework, providing parents and caregivers across the community with information and training which can assist them to raise their children in an appropriate manner.

Valuing Parent Education: A Cornerstone of Child Abuse Prevention, by Adam Tomison, National Child Protection Clearing House Issues Paper No.10, Spring 1998, is available free of charge from the Clearing House at the Australian Institute of Family Studies.

BECOME PART OF THE CHILD ABUSE PREVENTION NETWORK!

The National Child Protection Clearing House at the Australian Institute of Family Studies serves as an interchange point for information, research and initiatives in the child abuse prevention field. It collects and distributes information, and aims for a two-way involvement with the community concerned with child protection.



To participate in the work of the Clearing House –

- send us materials relevant to child abuse prevention;
- complete and return a questionnaire on research and program activities relevant to child protection with which you are involved;
- join the National Clearing House mailing list – you will receive two newsletters and two issues papers free of charge each year.

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