Knowledge of Parenting and Child Development

Parents who understand the usual course of child development are more likely to be able to provide their children with respectful communication, consistent rules and expectations, and opportunities that promote independence. But no parent can be an expert on all aspects of infant, child, and teenage development or on the most effective ways to support a child at each stage. When parents are not aware of normal developmental milestones, interpret their child’s behaviors in a negative way, or do not know how to respond to and effectively manage a child’s behavior, they can become frustrated and may resort to harsh discipline.

As children grow and mature, parents need to continue to learn and change how they respond to their children’s needs. Information about child development and parenting may come from many sources, including extended families, cultural practices, media, formal parent education classes, and a parent’s own experiences. Interacting with other children of similar ages helps parents better understand their own child. Observing other caregivers who use positive techniques for managing children’s behavior also provides an opportunity for parents to learn healthy alternatives.

Parenting styles need to be adjusted for each child’s unique temperament and circumstances. Parents of children with special needs may benefit from additional coaching and support to reduce frustration and help them become the parents their children need.

How Programs Can Help

- Offer informal, daily interactions between parents and program staff, plus coaching from staff on specific developmental challenges when they arise (e.g., inconsolable crying, eating or sleeping problems, biting, sharing toys, lying, problems with peers).
- Provide observation opportunities such as video monitors or windows into classrooms and outdoor space, where parents can watch their child interacting with other children and learn new techniques by observing staff.
- Give parents opportunities to participate in conversations with other parents about their own experiences as children and how they want to change their parenting.
- Offer a lending library of educational materials about parenting and child development.
How Workers Can Help

All parents have questions about raising their children, and they need timely answers and support from someone they trust. One way to describe this is simply to acknowledge, “Parenting is part natural and part learned.”

Parents may feel more comfortable voicing concerns and exploring solutions when providers:

- Focus on the parents’ own hopes and goals for their children
- Help parents identify and build on their strengths in parenting
- Model nurturing behavior by acknowledging frustrations and recognizing the parents’ efforts

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<th>In order to explore …</th>
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| The parent’s view of his/her child’s strengths | What does your child do best?  
What do you like about your child? |
| How the parent views his/her own role | What do you like about being a parent of an infant (or preschooler, or teenager)?  
What are some of the things that you find challenging as a parent? |
| How the parent observes and interprets the child’s behavior | What kinds of things make your child happy (frustrated, sad, angry)?  
What does your child do when he or she is happy (frustrated, sad, angry)?  
Why do you think your child (cries, eats slowly, says “no,” breaks rules)? |
| How the parent encourages positive behavior through praise and modeling | How have you let your child know what you expect?  
What happens when she/he does what you ask? |
| Whether the parent can identify alternative solutions for addressing difficult behaviors  
Community, cultural, and ethnic expectations and practices about parenting | How have you seen other parents handle this? What would your parents have done in this situation?  
What teaching (discipline) methods work best for you?  
How does your child respond? |
| How the parent understands the child’s development  
Any parental concern that the child’s behavior appears to be outside the normal range | How do you think your child compares to other children his/her age?  
Are there things that worry you about your child?  
Have others expressed concern about your child’s behavior? |
| How the parent encourages healthy development | How do you encourage your child to explore his/her surroundings, try new things, and do things on his/her own? |

FRIENDS has developed a comprehensive survey to help programs assess family protective factors. For more information, visit: [http://friendsnrc.org/protective-factors-survey](http://friendsnrc.org/protective-factors-survey)