

- Building Strong Communities
- Helping Youth Succeed
- Building Healthy Families

MSU Extension's Children, Youth and Family Programs help families succeed by improving life in homes, schools and communities. Educational opportunities are designed to meet the needs of people at all stages of the life cycle.

Developing Healthy Children, One Family at a Time

* Encouraging Father Involvement and Building Strong Families *

Issues

Nearly 25 million American children grow up in homes with absent fathers (*National Fatherhood Initiative*)

Family stability is strengthened by the presence of two parents. It is important for parents to understand the importance of the involvement of both the mother and father. When parents know more about the developmental needs of their children, they will choose to become involved with them. Parents will often remove barriers, change childrearing practices, and become more involved in their children's lives.

The need for parenting education has increased over time due to changing social and family conditions

Family life has been characterized by increasing stress, change in family structure and limited financial and social resources. Many parents seek support to assist them in becoming more responsive to their children's needs and to develop stronger parenting practices. (Chenoweth, Engelbrecht and Martin, 2000).

MSU Extension's Response

Promoting Father Involvement

Caring for my Family is a curriculum that helps parents of new-borns learn about building healthy relationships through a series of interactive educational experiences. The program's purpose is to equip unmarried mothers and fathers with skills for making healthy decisions and to explore options for their relationship including the potential of getting married. New parents learn skills for parenting together and strengthening their family.

Encouraging Positive Parenting Practices

Building Strong Families: Parenting Young Children and Building Strong Adolescents are statewide parenting education programs. These programs emphasize the importance of stimulating parent-child contact, positive discipline, and understanding the stages of child development. Parents learn to build and maintain relationships with their children through interactive experiences. BSF: Parenting Young Children assists families with children up to three years of age. Building Strong Adolescents is for families with children between the ages of 10-18.

* Strengthening Early Literacy *

Issues

Preschools, particularly those serving lower income audiences, need assistance in preparing children for school.

Preschools are under greater pressure to introduce instruction in basic academic skills, with the intention of helping children learn skills essential for later school success (Marcon, 2002). One in five children enters kindergarten lacking basic print familiarity skills, with one in three children unable to recognize letters of the alphabet (US Department of Education, 1998).

Parents are a vital component in the development of literacy skills, but are unsure of how to teach children "reading readiness".

Research suggests that successful family literacy programs support development of a full range of literacy skills for children, including parenting classes to aid parents in fostering these skills (Snow and Tabors, 1996). Parents participating in family literacy programs were more likely to include literacy activities as part of their daily family routines (Purcell and Gates, 1994).

MSU Extension's Response

Building Strong Families: Parenting the Preschooler

This is a program for limited literacy and/or limited resource families with children between the ages of three and five with the goal of helping parents gain knowledge and skills to effectively respond to, interact with, and guide their children, with a focus on school readiness. Literacy activities for parents and children are integral to the program. These activities teach parents how to support their children's literacy through reading, conversation, and play based on preschool development concepts.

Pyramids Between the Pages for the Young Child

Pyramids Between the Pages for the Young Child is an educational program for families that links literacy with nutrition education and physical activity. Families learn basic nutrition and physical activity concepts for children ages two to five while learning how to prepare their children for school by using basic literacy skill building strategies. The program aids in teaching children print awareness, phonetics and phonemics, while encouraging healthy behaviors that could potentially last a lifetime.



for more information please contact:

Dawn Koger, Ph.D., Program Leader
kogerd@msue.msu.edu 248-858-0898
Meagan Shedd, Associate Program Leader
sheddm@msue.msu.edu 517-353-8594
Jodi Spicer, Associate Program Leader
spicerj@msue.msu.edu 517-353-9359

Bringing Knowledge to Life!

MSU Extension helps people improve their lives through an educational process that applies knowledge to critical issues, needs and opportunities. This organization provides access to research, knowledge and programming in all 83 Michigan counties. It is funded jointly by county boards of commissioners, the state of Michigan through Michigan State University, and federally through the U.S. Department of Agriculture.

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* Increasing Access to Quality Child Care *

Issues

Child care quality does matter

High quality child care affects children's language, academic, and social skill development, and impacts all children from diverse backgrounds. Child care providers and the relationships they have with families are one of the most important elements in quality child care. Providers who have more education and training have shown to help children be more cooperative, stick with tasks, and be ready for school. Trained providers understand how children develop, and know how to provide activities and materials that are appropriate to their developmental age and stage. The benefits of high quality early learning environments also have long term impact, resulting in young adults with higher cognitive scores, a stronger likelihood of attending a four-year college, and later age at birth of first child. (Cost, Quality and Outcomes Study by the National Center for Early development & Learning; The Carolina Abecedarian Project).

MSU Extension's Response

The Better Kid Care project

MSU Extension Educators provide training and education to child care providers across the state of Michigan through two interrelated projects. The **BKC satellite training series** targets current child care providers working in both family homes and centers. Located in 44 counties, the project covers a broad variety of topics, and has resulted in an increase in provider knowledge. The **BKC training and mentoring project** is located in five Michigan communities, and targets those providers who are not currently providing licensed care. Through a 36-hour training, participants learn relevant skills such as child development, health and safety, nutrition, professionalism and business development, and CPR certification. Paraprofessionals working on the project train and mentor project participants, supporting them through the child care licensing process.

* Promoting Positive Child Health *

Issues

Environmental Justice and Child Health

Access to child health resources remains a continued concern. Disproportionate numbers of Michigan's children are affected by environmental hazards like lead, secondhand smoke and radon. Over 10% of Detroit's children have been lead poisoned and many children in rural areas lack adequate health and social services that prevent them from being exposed to these toxins and promote optimal health throughout childhood. Excessive exposure to these hazards can lead to behavioral problems, developmental delays, lowered IQ, poor physical growth, and death. Exposure to secondhand smoke is the second leading cause of preventable death in Michigan. (U.S. Environmental Protection Agency)

MSU Extension's Response

Don't Croak on Secondhand Smoke is a children's health curriculum being taught to low-income parents of young children. This research-based program teaches parents about the hazards of exposing children to secondhand smoke and helps them carry out goals to protect children from environmental tobacco smoke.

Protection from vaccine-preventable diseases is another way MSU Extension (MSUE) is promoting children's health. The *Physician Peer Education Project on Immunization* has combined the Michigan Department of Community Health's technical knowledge with MSUE's statewide outreach to help health care providers reach all children with immunizations.

MSUE is developing a four-module curriculum designed to educate low-income parents of young children about environmental hazards and assist them in low-cost remediation and mitigation of these problems. The *Home Safe Kids* curriculum will focus on increasing awareness of the dangers of radon, secondhand smoke, mold and lead to children. The curriculum will be piloted this summer and available to state and federal agencies this fall.



for more information please contact:

Dawn Contreras, Ph.D., Program Leader
contrera@msue.msu.edu 517-353-3886

Rosene Cobbs, Associate Program Leader
cobbsr@msue.msu.edu 517-432-7692

Lisa McGlone, Associate Program Leader
mcglonel@msue.msu.edu 517-432-7652

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