

It is an unwarranted assumption that parenting is intuitive – a natural instinct that comes with the delivery of a child to your family. Admittedly, there are folks who seem more “natural” at it than others, but I would argue that much of this comes from experience and good role models rather than being intuitive. Perhaps these “natural” parents are the oldest sibling in their family or they cared for younger children by babysitting or volunteering with younger children.

Parenting is a skill that is learned by watching what others do, trying different approaches, knowing how children develop, and personal experience. Parenting requires a wide variety of resources including time, energy, financial resources, not to mention the emotional investment. It is a challenging journey that often leaves parents wondering if there is more they can do or how they can be better at parenting. Now there is a new program in Geary County designed to better equip parents for the challenge.

Over the past several months, representatives from eight area agencies that work with families and parents have been working together to provide parents with the opportunity to polish their skills as they work hard to raise their children. The efforts of this group, called the Modern Parenting Initiative, have resulted in the development of a 6-session parenting class designed to help parents develop stronger parenting skills. The primary program they will be using, Basic Parenting, was developed by K-State Research and Extension to help parents identify their existing strengths and work on areas that they self-identify as areas needing improvement. Each session will focus on one of the following categories of parenting skills: Care for Self, Understand, Guide, Nurture, Motivate and Advocate.

Today’s generation of parents are facing pressures and situations that were not faced by previous generations and there are several social trends that are changing the tapestry of American families: 1) increased number of single parent families; 2) increased gaps between social classes; 3) increased mobility of parents; 4) limited employment opportunities in some areas; 4) shift from social focus on neighborhoods to the large community, as a whole.

With these social trends in mind, take a closer look at each of the categories for parenting skills that the MPI sponsored parenting class will explore.

Care for Self: This includes both knowing and understanding oneself as an individual. It involves knowing how one handles the demands of everyday living and what direction they want their life to be going. A parent who has the skills and resources to take better care of themselves, in turn, have a greater skill at being able to provide their children with the environment they need to thrive.

Understand: Children are complex and have unique individual needs. Understanding children helps reduce the potential for conflicts and offers an avenue for developing better relationships with them. This session will look at the developmental stages children go through and how parenting skills can be adjusted as that development occurs. With a better understanding of children, parents are better equipped to help their children develop into healthy and secure people.

Guide: One of the many challenges in parenting is in finding a balance between establishing authority while allowing children to explore their environment and become responsible for themselves. Guiding focuses on encouraging personal development in the midst of providing structure and enforcing expectations. Striking a reasonable balance in those efforts can be challenging for parents, especially if their personal experiences have not been positive ones.

Nurture: Providing a nurturing environment is likely the most important contribution a parent can make to their child's development. Being raised in a nurturing environment is a key indicator of a child's ability to grow into a competent and healthy adult. The world families live in today taxes the emotional resources they have – often beyond their limits of coping. This can take a toll on the ability of parents to provide a consistently nurturing home environment. Providing external resources for parents to turn to is an important role of our community. Helping parents identify internal resources they possess will also help them ensure a nurturing environment for their children.

Motivate: This term has a significantly different meaning in the context of parenting skills. Motivate includes the actions and behaviors parents display that promote the intellectual development in their children. It is true that a parent is the first teacher a child has. Parents who recognize this role in the lives of their children can capitalize on the opportunities they have to help their children become more confident and skilled learners. Children need the opportunity to learn and parents can support and encourage that need in their approaches to parenting.

Advocate: When a parent advocates for their child, they are connecting with community resources (including schools and family service organizations) to ensure that the needs of their children are being met. When barriers impede on a child's ability to grow and thrive, advocate parents speak up and take appropriate action to remove those barriers.

Author Josh Billings once said, "To bring up a child in the way he should go - travel that way yourself." Parenting is perhaps the toughest job an adult will ever have and one that requires use of many resources to help us travel the path that is best for our

children. If you want to register for the MPI Basic Parenting class, contact the Geary County K-State Research and Extension office at 238-4161 or drop by our office at 119 E. 9th Street. The first 6-session class begins August 26 at 6:00 p.m. at the Devin Education Center – Kansas room located at 123 N. Eisenhower. Preregistration, due August 21st, is required. Until next time, keep living resourcefully!