

CO-OP COMMUNITY NEWS

From the Parent Advisory Council
of the North Seattle Community College
Cooperative Preschool Program



May 2006

Bringing Baby Home- A Workshop for Couples

Beth Goss, Parent Educator

Did you know that 67% of mothers say they are less satisfied with their marriage/relationship 6 months after their first child is born than before they had a child? How about this, fathers experience a similar decline but not until after baby turns one year. Does this mean we should avoid having children to stay happy with our partners? Of course, if you're reading this, it's too late for that! What parents need to know is the secret to being part of the 33% who report continued or increased satisfaction with their relationship with their partner.

Drs. John Gottman and Alyson Shapiro set out to do just that in 1999. What started out as a small pilot project seven years ago has turned into a couple's workshop taught all over the country called Bringing Baby Home. Because this workshop is research-based Gottman's team has been able to track couples before, during, and after the training. They've determined that couples who participate in the workshop report higher relationship quality, less interpersonal hostility, and much lower incidence of post partum depression.

Drs. Gottman and Shapiro studied the transition to parenthood and found that couples can expect 4 major changes after the birth of their baby. It's how parents adjust to these changes that determine relationship success.

First, couples experience a profound

philosophical shift. Women and men realize they are not just daughters and sons, they are now also mothers and fathers. As couples try to figure out what that means for them, they tend to fall into traditional gender roles which may wind up being a source of strain on the relationship.



Second, the couple's relationship changes in other ways. Conflicts tend to increase after we become parents. Unfortunately, conversation and intimacy tend to decrease during the same time.

Third, fathers tend to withdraw. Mothers often receive support from women relatives and friends, which can make dad feel left out or unneeded. The research has also found that fathers who are unhappy with their marriage are more likely to withdraw, and babies tend to withdraw from unhappily married fathers. This is a cycle that contributes to relationship conflict.

Finally, there are physical and

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psychological changes to deal with. Remember how much sleep you got the 1st six months of parenthood? New parents tend to be sleep deprived and stressed for extended periods of time. Exhaustion can lead to depression and can also lead to decreased sexual desire.

The Bringing Baby Home couple's workshop gives mothers and fathers an opportunity to deal with these changes in a positive way. On the first day of the training the goal is strengthening friendships with each other. Couples do this through a series of activities which support them expressing needs and wants, learning to listen, and expressing affection. On the second day couples learn about handling conflict in their relationship. Because conflict tends to increase dramatically after the birth of a baby, it's important to have a game plan for how you will handle it. The goal is not to avoid the argument, it's to deal with you conflict constructively.

As a parent educator, both at North Seattle Community College and at Swedish Medical Center, I've been following John Gottman's work for a number of years. Several of my fellow educators at Swedish helped the Gottman team develop and carry out

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Never be late for school again! ... or at least be on time more often

by Tom Hobson

"Quit dawdling!"

"Hurry up!"

"Do you want to be late for school?"

You can see it coming, but there doesn't seem to be anything you can do about it. You've tried planning and preparation. You've set your alarm for a half hour earlier. You've had long, calm talks with your child detailing your expectations about the morning routine. Yet, invariably, day after day, you feel the knot tightening in your gut as the school bell draws nigh. Once again you're badgering and even threatening your kids to get them out the door. Perhaps the worst part is that after all that stress and effort you're still, as usual, 15 minutes late.

None of us want to nag or threaten. It leaves our children sulky and makes us feel like we're turning into exactly the kind of parents we promised ourselves we would never become. It sometimes feels, however, that it's the only option left.

How would it make you feel to not only get to school on time, but to have your own child taking the lead in making it happen? It's possible.

Listen to yourself

I'd like you to try this little experiment at home. Point to a dirty carpet and say to your spouse, "Vacuum the living room." You don't need to actually try this, do you? The mental experiment is enough: there is a very low probability that your carpet will get cleaned unless you do it yourself.

Nobody likes to be told what to do and this includes children. Ultimately, you might get the results you want because you are bigger, stronger and control the key to the pantry, but is this really the kind of parent you want to be?



Listen to yourself as you go through your morning routine (it might even be helpful to tape record yourself for a few mornings). What kinds of things are you saying to your child? Most of us are addicted to directing our children, especially during transitional periods like getting ready for school. (e.g., "Pull up your socks," "Finish your breakfast," "Brush your teeth.") Many of us try to soften these "bossy" statements by turning them into questions (e.g., "Wash your face, okay?"), but to your child's ear, it's all the same. It's not any less of a direction if you say it in a soft voice.

The human tendency is to rebel against being bossed around. We might do what we're told at first, but ultimately we grow to resent it. We dig in our heels. We argue. Our inner child shrieks, "You're not the boss of me!" Can we expect our children to be any different?

Another thing to listen for are questions to which you either already know the answer or that don't really have an answer (e.g., "Didn't I tell you to come downstairs?" "How many times have I told you to put on your shoes?"). Your preschool child either recognizes these for what they are (veiled directions) or feels challenged to actually answer the unanswerable – a stress inducing situation at best.

Putting your child in charge

The reason we rebel against directional statements is that the human animal generally wants to feel in control. Being told by others what to do strikes us as an effort to undermine our autonomy. It would therefore seem that one of the worst ways to get children to do what you want is to tell them to do it.

Am I saying that the key to getting out the door on time is to put your child in charge? Yes.

This does not mean that you must sacrifice your own desires and wisdom. In fact, Child Protective Services would likely soon be knocking on your door if you did. But the process of getting to school on time is every bit as much your child's responsibility as it is yours. Sharing that responsibility with your child not only provides her with a sense of pride and control, but it also takes some of the pressure off of you; maybe even loosening that knot in the pit of your stomach.

Speaking informatively with your child

Now try our mental experiment again, but this time simply state, "The living room carpet is dirty." Don't point, don't make "knowing" eyes, just formulate the statement. You still might have to do it yourself, but the probability of the carpet getting vacuumed goes way up. This happens because by merely making a statement of fact, you are creating a circumstance in which you put your spouse in control – he gets to make his own decision concerning what to do about the dirty carpet.

Speaking informatively with children

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Not so Typical Spring Cleaning: Tackling the “Dirty” Job of Making a Will

By Mary-Colleen Jenkins

According to Suzanne Stipe Persaud in her article *Where There’s a Will*, only 34% of parents have a will. I hate to admit it, but my husband and I are part of the 66% of American parents who don’t have a will.

Our reluctance to create a will does not stem from poor role models—we both have parents who are extremely organized and prepared plans many, many years ago for their eventual deaths. It does not stem from lack of education or resources—if we don’t want to pay a lawyer to draw up a will, there are many software programs that we could use to draw up our own will for a nominal fee. It does not stem from a belief that we are invincible and will live forever—we’ve lost one close family member and two college friends over the past year, all unexpectedly. So we’ve been reminded all too recently about our mortality. What is it, then, that has caused us to avoid, avoid, avoid, getting down to the “dirty” business of creating a will?

It’s simple: Creating a will is not a pleasant task, we don’t enjoy discussing our own inevitable demise, and there are so many other things—happy things—we’d rather be doing in our dwindling amount of free time. But it’s time we swallowed hard and got to work. Our children’s futures depend on it.

I’m not going to write an exhaustive article on how to go about writing a will, but I will share some of the things I’ve learned as I’ve started my research:

- The most important reason parents should have a will is to designate



guardianship of their children. If you want to control who will raise your children in case of your death, then it is imperative that you make your wishes known in a legal will.

- Even if you do make a designation in your will, the state courts have ultimate say in who will be the guardian of your children...most likely your designation in the will is going to be what the court decides.
- You do not have to choose the same person to have both custodial guardianship of your children and financial guardianship of the children. It may be important to you to separate these responsibilities.
- Washington State is a Community Property state, which means that property you acquire while you’re married is assumed by the state to be equally owned by both spouses. However, a surviving spouse only automatically inherits marital property if there is a will or other legal agreement that leaves the deceased spouse’s property to the surviving spouse. If there is no such

agreement, then the property has to go through probate. This means that it may be advisable for each spouse to have a separate, individual will or other legal community property agreement that leaves all property to the surviving spouse and then to have a joint will that determines guardianship, etc., if both parents die.

- If parents die without a will, the state may divide the property 50%-50% between the surviving spouse and the children. This may sound good, but since children may not be able to inherit until age 18, that means that 50% of the property is unavailable for the surviving parent to use to support the children. That parent would have to petition the state to be able to use that resource, a legal headache.
- There are reputable legal software programs that you can use to write a will, living will, and many other documents that will be legal to the courts. However, some experts advise having an attorney go over these types of documents with you after they’re completed to be sure all your bases are covered, particularly if you have a complex financial situation. A local attorney will be able to counsel you on state specific legalities the software may not cover.
- If you want to go the straight route of hiring an attorney to do all the paperwork for you, you might still want to go through the process of working through a software program. It will save you some

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Making a Will...

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attorney fees if you walk into your first meeting with all the pertinent information in hand.

- Though you may be worried that designating a particular person(s) as guardians of your children may cause hurt feelings in the family, that cannot be a main concern when writing your will. Chances are that you'll never need guardians other than yourselves for the kids, but in case the need does arise, you need to be sure that the best person(s) for the job has been chosen.
- I found a great questionnaire to get me started at the web site of a local attorney, Mary Anne Vance. See web site below. I know nothing about her or her office, but the questionnaire is very useful for gathering information.

I'm still not at all enthusiastic about finally getting down to the business of writing that will, but I think that this time of year may be the best time to do it. The dismal days of winter are moving behind us, the flowers are blooming. It's the traditional time of year to clean house and open ourselves to the new season of growth and renewal. Why not jump right into this "dirty" job, get it over with, and spend the rest of the season living completely in the moment?

Useful Resources for Getting Down to it:

The American Bar Association: Section of Real Property, Probate, and Trust Law
www.abanet.org/rppt/public/home.html

Lawyers.com: Directory of Seattle Area Trusts and Estates Lawyers and Law Firms

<http://cobranders.lawyers.com/lawyers/P~P~~Seattle~Washington~TRUSTS%20AND%20ESTATES~LDS~Y~Firms.html>

Estate Planning Questionnaire: From the law Office of Mary Anne Vance

<http://vancelaw.com/questionnaires.asp>

Washington State Attorney General's Office: Information on "Dealing with Death"

<http://www.atg.wa.gov/consumer/death/textonly.htm>

Where There's a Will by Suzanne Stipe Persaud

<http://www.fitpregnancy.com/yournewlife/241?page=2>

Why every parent needs a will: Designate a guardian to care for your children if you die before they become legal adults by Lianna McSwain

<http://lifestyle.msn.com/FamilyandParenting/raisingkids/ArticleBC2.aspx?cp-documentid=343083>

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works in the same way. Instead of directing your child in the morning, make an effort to limit yourself to informative statements. This is not as restraining as it may at first sound. You may talk about yourself (e.g., "I don't want to be late for school," "I can help you with your shoes," "I expect you to be ready by the time the big hand is on the 3."). You may talk about what your child sees, hears, or senses (e.g., "Your pants are on your bed," "The big hand is almost on the 3," "Your toothbrush is on the counter."). You may talk about possibilities and connections to other things (e.g., "Yesterday we missed circle time because we were late," "When we lay our clothes out the night before it doesn't take as long to get dressed."

Once you have practiced replacing your directional statements with informational statements for awhile, it's time to try the descriptive cue sequence.

The descriptive cue sequence

The descriptive cue sequence is a powerful tool developed by North Seattle Community College instructor and early childhood education authority Tom Drummond for helping you get in the habit of speaking informatively. The sequence gradually increases the amount of "push" with each step. Don't move on to the next step as long as you are getting the results you want.

1. Give cue

- Instead of directing your child to get ready for school, give a cue, such as, "It's time to get dressed."
- Some parents might prefer sounding a signal of some kind, like a bell or a song.

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2.No help

- Wait for 10 to 15 seconds
- Look for appropriate behavior and reward it by describing it or with a non-verbal recognition (e.g., thumbs up, big smile)

3.Describe

- Describe what needs to be done without telling your child what to do
- Give facts—what needs doing, where things are, etc.

4. Model

- Model the desired behavior by doing some yourself
- Talk aloud about what you are doing

5.Direct

- If inaction is still a problem, give a simple, clear direction, e.g., "Please put on your socks."

6.Set a contingency

- Make the next activity dependent on completion of the task, e.g., "When you put on your socks, you can pick out which Hot Wheel you want to take in the car."

As you and your child grow accustomed to this process, you will find a decreasing need to employ the higher numbers on the list. Many parents find it helpful to post the descriptive cue sequence on their wall in a conspicuous place, at least until they have learned the procedure.

You may not notice an immediate change in your child – it can take time for him to grow accustomed to the feeling of control and responsibility. If you stick with it, however, your child will gain a sense of pride and power as he is given responsibility and control over his own preparation for school.

You will, however, feel an immediate change in how you feel about yourself. You won't be nagging or threatening and very quickly you will begin to feel like the kind of parent you always promised yourself you wanted to be.

And if that's not enough, you and your child will get to school when you want to . . . at least most of the time. 

Bringing Baby Home

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the pilot program and have ultimately produced the Bringing Baby Home workshop as it stands today. Last November I had the opportunity to participate in the training that certifies me to facilitate this workshop. It was an exciting and challenging three days and I came away from the experience very enthusiastic about this new support for families in our community. I highly recommend the workshop to any expectant parents, as well as to parents of infants and toddlers. It provides a wonderful compliment to the parent education and support you already receive through co-op.

If you're interested in learning more about the couple's workshop you can visit www.bringingbabyhomeonline.org or www.swedish.org. Classes are offered at the First Hill and Ballard campuses. 

Spring Parenting Quotes

"Raising children is a lot like cultivating a garden; it's a matter of unconditional love, proper care, and a good climate for growth." -*Edna Leshan*

"When life hands your children garbage, let us teach them to make compost." -*E. Worm*

"Weeds are flowers too, once you get to know them." -*AA Milne*

"There is a garden in every childhood, an enchanted place where colors are brighter, the air softer, and the morning more fragrant than ever again." -*Elizabeth Lawrence*

"There are two lasting bequests we can give our children: One is roots. The other is wings." -*Hodding Carter, Jr.*

"In search of my mother's garden, I found my own." -*Alice Walker*

"Children are like gardens...In order to thrive, they need sunlight, boundless care, and warmth, frequent baths, and lot of good, clean dirt." -*LAH*

"We look back with gratitude to those who touched our human feelings. Warmth is the vital element for the growing plant and for the good of the child." -*Carl Gustav Jung*

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