Too often, a family’s ability to participate in family support programs hinges on their ability to complete lengthy applications, produce birth certificates, divulge personal information or ensure that their schedule accommodates an additional responsibility to welcome a stranger into the inner parts of their life. As a result, families feel burdened by services that are supposed to positively impact their quality of life.

According to the Harvard’s Center for the Developing Child, family support professionals can take these four steps to reduce the stress that is commonly experienced by families in care.

Meet Basic Needs First
Families who are able to address those concerns first are better able to focus on achieving longer-term goals and aspirations. They can also devote their own resources such as informal support systems, time and effort, to address their own mental health needs, gain knowledge of parenting and child behaviors, and meet the social emotional needs of their child.

Streamline and Simplify
Be sure that forms are available in multiple languages and formats. If multiple agencies are asking for the same information, consider streamlining the process to include ways to share data across organizations with the parent’s permission. If parents are met with the challenge of completing mountains of paperwork, they may be less likely to engage in future processes, such as goal setting, which would benefit from their full participation.

Be a Coach, Not a Boss
Use a strengths based approach to facilitating a reflective conversation about their needs. Note the family’s resilience and help them to identify opportunities to continue building their strengths.

Use Accessible, Familiar Tools
Partner with families to identify concrete supports that they have used in prior times of need. In addition to their support network, help them to identify strategies and tools that have worked before to help them meet their needs and goals.

Working with families to reduce barriers to meet goals, enhance the quality of interactions between family members, and improve their overall sense of well-being, ultimately enables them to build their protective factors.

Source
Parents as Teachers affiliates are required to maintain their certification and adhere to 17 Essential Requirements of the model in order to ensure the high quality of services they provide to children and families. Additionally, affiliates take part in the Quality Endorsement and Improvement (QEIP) process once every five years as part of their continuous quality improvement efforts.

To earn the Quality Endorsement, affiliates must complete a comprehensive self-study and review process that demonstrates they are meeting or exceeding the PAT Essential Requirements, along with at least 75 of the 100 Quality Standards.

Programs that earn the Quality Endorsement are recognized by the national PAT office as exemplary Blue Ribbon Affiliates delivering high quality services to children and families. The following PA programs earned the Blue Ribbon for the 2016 year, granted October, 2017.

- Children’s Advocacy Center of Lawrence County
- Community Prevention Partnerships of Berks County
- EOTC-Scranton Area Family Center
- Family Resource Center of Blair County
- Greene County Family Center
- Mercer County Family Center – Community Connections Greenville Area School District
- Mercer County Family Center – Farrell Area School District
- Mercer County Family Center – Sharon City School District
- Parenting Plus Program, Centre County Youth Service Bureau

They join these Blue ribbon affiliates who participated in the Quality Endorsement and Improvement Process (QEIP) in previous years.

- ARIN Intermediate Unit 28
- Cameron County Family Center for Child Development, Cameron County Commissioners
- Child Development – Parents as Teachers, Erie School District, Erie Family Center
- Columbia County Family Center – P.A.T., Columbia County Commissioners, County Government

Pennsylvania PAT office congratulates these affiliates for their accomplishments implementing the PAT with close adherence to the model. The families in your community are fortunate they are part of such a stellar program.

Using Penelope? Need Help?
Penelope Q&A sessions are available upon request for all PAT Affiliate programs in Pennsylvania. Contact Wenda Deardorff for more information or to schedule a session.

Cultivating Mindfulness to Reduce Stress and Increase Positive Parenting

Mindfulness has been in the news and discussed in family support circles for some time. But what is it? What are the benefits? How does mindfulness relate to parenting? This article will explore these topics and provide resources for family support professionals and parents to learn more about this practice.

Mindfulness is “the basic human ability to be fully present, aware of where we are and what we’re doing, and not overly reactive or overwhelmed by what’s going on around us.”¹ This definition helps us to identify mindfulness as a state of being, rather than a trait. It takes practice to be mindful and there are a variety of methods to help cultivate mindfulness. The American Psychological Association (APA) has reviewed research on mindfulness and identifies the following as possible benefits from mindfulness practice:

**Reduced rumination** – simply put, mindfulness practice helps us to reduce the litany of thoughts (often negative) we may have running through our minds at any given moment.

**Reduced stress** – the studies cite by APA note that individuals that practice mindfulness experience an increase in positive affect and a decrease in depression and anxiety.

**Boosts to working memory** – studies show that mindfulness practice increases memory capacity.

Increased focus and less emotional reactivity – mindfulness may help us focus our attention on tasks and limit distractions, including overwhelming emotions.

**More cognitive flexibility** – mindfulness can help us to develop self-observation which can aid in integrating previous learning with current learning.

**Increased relationship satisfaction** – mindfulness increases our ability to handle relationship related stress and may help us to develop skills to communicate our emotions to others.²

Mindfulness can also be applied to parenting. Lead researcher on a study of
mindful parenting from the University of Vermont, Justin Parent explains that “to bring mindful attention and awareness into your interactions with your child really seems to set the stage for you to be a good parent.” The study found that parents that exhibited more mindful behavior with their children engaged in more positive and less negative parenting practices which correlated with more positive behaviors in their children. The researchers describe the foundations of this practice as:

• Noticing your own feelings when you are in conflict with your child
• Learning to pause before responding in anger
• Listening carefully to a child’s viewpoint even when disagreeing with it

Parents that practice mindfulness report that it improves their relationships with their children as well as supports challenging aspects of parenting like facilitating transitions. One parent practicing mindfulness explains “it makes you stop and think about how you’re running things as a parent and how you’re setting things up for success or not.”

There are many ways to cultivate mindfulness including body scans, meditation, practicing gratitude and breathing exercises. To learn more about mindfulness and techniques that cultivate it explore the following resources:

Mindful.org provides articles describing mindfulness practices including those that parents can practice in their families as well as resources.

Eight Ways to Bring Mindfulness into Your Family is an article that was featured on Parent Toolkit by Randy Taran the founder of Project Happiness.

How might you integrate mindfulness in your programs, your own life or in practices with the parents you serve?


Toys – Be Safety Smart This Holiday Season

The holiday season is here and for many kids that means one thing – toys. Approximately 50 percent of all toy purchases in the United States occur between the Friday after Thanksgiving and Christmas. Toy sales accounted for $20.4 billion dollars in 2016, buying toys (outdoor and sports, youth electronics, dolls, etc.) is on almost everyone’s holiday buying list. There are things to consider before you head out to buy those gifts.

Top tips for making sure children’s toys are safe during this holiday season.

• Before shopping for toys, consider the child’s age, interest and skill level. A fun, but inappropriate toy for a particular child can be dangerous.

• Children can choke on small toys and toy parts. Keep toys with small parts away from children under age three, and check toys regularly for damage that could create small pieces that are choking hazards.

• Toys are labeled for child appropriateness, even if your child is mature, these toys can be dangerous if not following the guidelines provided.

• Actively supervise children when they are playing with riding toys as well as any toy that has small parts, magnets, electrical or battery power, cords and strings, wheels or any other potential hazard. Active supervision means keeping the child in sight and in reach while paying undivided attention.

• Avoid letting children play with electronic devices that are only intended for adults such as key fobs, mini remote controls, watches, flameless candles, singing greeting cards, etc. Many of these items contain coin-sized button batteries, which can be deadly if ingested, and should be kept out of reach if battery compartments are not secure.

Stay informed about harmful products in the marketplace. Sign up for email alerts on recalled children’s products at Recalls.gov.
The Sharing Corner

The Sharing Corner is for you, by you. Share your expertise, celebrations, testimonies and news. Send an email with the information you would like to share to Wenda Deardorff.

* Center for Schools and Communities reserves the right to determine the appropriateness of the information.

Family Support

Family Support Webinars
First Wednesday of the month
10:00 AM - 11:15 AM
Jan 10, Teaching Empathy: It’s Part of Life
Feb 1, TBA
Mar 1, TBA

Parents as Teachers

Until one month prior to the event, registration will only be open to Pennsylvania participants. If you have a new hire in the month before the event, contact Wenda Deardorff.

PAT Foundational & Model Implementation
For new parent educators & supervisors of affiliate programs
Jan 22-26, Camp Hill, Pa.

PAT Foundational
For new approved users
Jan 22-24, Camp Hill, Pa.
Mar 12-14, Homestead, Pa.

PA Foundational 2: 3 Years through Kindergarten
Feb 26-27, Camp Hill, Pa.
Apr 9-10, Homestead, Pa.

Family Support at the Center for Schools and Communities provides training and technical assistance to Parents as Teachers providers, Children’s Trust Fund grantees and the Strengthening Families Leadership Team.
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Pennsylvania Parents as Teachers is based at the Center for Schools and Communities. Learn more at the following sites:
- Children’s Trust Fund
- Strengthening Families

Children’s Trust Fund
Strengthening Families
Pennsylvania Office of Child Development and Early Learning