



PRACTICAL PARENTING PARTNERSHIPS  
*Working Together for Our Children*

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## ENGAGING PARENTS FOR IMPROVED SOCIAL AND EMOTIONAL DEVELOPMENT IN CHILDREN

by Janet Shepard, Director

Though we might use different terms to describe the goal, parents and teachers alike can agree that they want the children we nurture, raise and teach to be socially and emotionally healthy. Building strong, positive relationships with parents is one way to encourage and strengthen healthy social and emotional development. PPP Trainer and Family Therapist, Rene McCreary shared an article on the Top Ten reasons to include family therapy as a part of a treatment plan. Rene thought and we agreed that this list applies to family engagement in education. See what you think:

1. Families have an important story to tell about their child and his/her likes and other behaviors.
2. The family's perspective about the child affects the child's self perception.
3. Family strengths shape the child's strengths and are a resource for the child.
4. Family challenges may impact the child's ability to learn and grow.
5. By meeting and knowing parents, you become knowledgeable about important cultural influences.
6. Family commitment to education affects the child's commitment to learning and educational success.
7. Families see progress and frustrations in the home which the child may not show at school.
8. Positive changes can be accelerated when the parents are engaged.
9. Parents may unknowingly work against the school when they are not aware of what is being taught and why; when they do not understand behavior or educational plans.
10. When you share with families and ask them to reinforce positive gains at home, the advancement will accelerate.

Adapted from *Provider Navigator*, CorpHealth, 3<sup>rd</sup> Quarter, 2008

The first week in May is Children's Mental Health Awareness Week. You will find links and resources throughout this issue of *Working Together for Our Children*. This year more than ever with financial stress weighing heavily on schools and families, it is important that we stop to think about what we are doing to foster optimum social and emotional development for our children.

## PPP CENTER UPDATE

by Janet Shepard, Director

As another school year winds to a close, we want to thank you for your continued use of PPP training, staff development, family workshops, resources and more. All orders, requests for workshops and training, and partnering with us on the PIRC grant have helped us stay in business. It goes without saying that we do not have any state funding again for 2011. That makes it even more important for us to have your support next year. We also know that you need our support in supporting parents in these challenging times. Working together we can meet and beat the challenges!

If you can anticipate resource orders for the next school year, you may want to order them at this year's prices. Just go to the [order form](#) on the website, print the form and place your order. Remember, we are once again accepting credit cards, but the card information needs to be called in to Donna.

This year it is more important than ever that we hear about your parent involvement efforts and activities for this school year. The [annual report](#) is available online. Those of you who receive funding or support through the PIRC grant via PPP must complete the survey by May 12. All other PPP schools are invited to complete the form and are asked to do so by June 30.

With cuts in funding, layoffs and more many of us in schools are stressed right now. It seems appropriate that we take some time to think about our mental health throughout the month of May, which is Mental Health Month, and the first week of the month in particular which is Children's Mental Health Awareness Week. We have provided some resources, ideas, and additional reading for you in this issue of the newsletter. One resource we think you will find particularly useful is the Mental Health White Paper, entitled [Promoting Mental Health in Missouri's Children: A Guide for Schools, Families, and Communities](#) published by the Coordinated School Health Coalition.

## GRANTS

by Janet Shepard, Director

Parent / school organizations are encouraged to apply for recognition as the *Parent Group of the Year*. Grand prize is \$3000 with runner up awards of \$1,000 and \$500. Applications are due June 1, 1010. Check the [PTO website](#) for details.

## KINDERGARTEN TRANSITION

by Janet Shepard, Director

Thinking about beginning kindergarten can be stressful for children. They may worry about whether their friends will be at school, if they will like their teacher, riding the bus or what it will be like to be away from home for such a long time each day. Teachers at sending and receiving schools have some responsibility to make beginning kindergarten less stressful. Of course at PPP, we encourage you to meet in community-wide teams to plan well in advance for a smooth transition. If you haven't pulled a team together yet or if the team is not meeting as often as you would like, there are still some things you can be doing to aid in transition. Those who have attended PPP's Transition to Kindergarten Training have a wealth of ideas in the large purple binder. You will also find ideas in back issues of this newsletter which are archived on our website. The National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) also has resources on their website. [NAEYC](#) posts their magazine for preschool teachers, *Teaching Young Children* on their website. On that site you will also find a series entitled *Message in a Backpack*. The April – May, 2010 issue is called *Starting Kindergarten*. It is a one page, camera ready handout designed to be sent home to parents with pre-school students. The handout contains two great lists. One is on helping children manage their end of the preschool year feelings while the other list focuses on moving on to kindergarten.

There is still time to plan and carry out an event for kindergarten registration and orientation. Even hosting such an event in the summer will cut down on stress for children and their families. It will also be less stressful for teachers and those who are in charge of enrollment if as many children as possible are enrolled prior to the start of the school year. If we can help you plan such an event, let us know. We would be happy to meet with your planning team.

## **SITE NEWS**

Transition Night is for 4<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> graders who are making the change to middle school and high school. All organizations have booths set up to tell the incoming students about the benefits of joining. The counselors meet with the parents and students first and introduce all the teachers they could have next year. The teachers then go to their rooms and older students take the new students around.

- Sue, Morgan County R-I, Stover

The Climax Springs Elementary School hosted a successful and fun reading night! The night featured a chili supper, book fair, reading carnival, and PAT activities. Families actively participated in reading themed games set up throughout the school, browsed the book fair, and ate dinner. Families with younger children enjoyed nursery rhyme activities and decorate cookies. Staff members participated in full force, helping ensure that the evening run smoothly. Alice Beck coordinated the well attended event, with the support of Shelly Lock from the PPP center.

- Climax Springs R-IV, Elementary School

## **MENTAL HEALTH AND ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT**

by Shelly Lock, Program Development Coordinator

Children's health and school achievement are intertwined. We tend to take notice of physical health or lack of and address the issues of nutrition, sleep, illness, vision and more as we see them affecting student performance. However, oftentimes, there are hidden mental health factors affecting a child's performance that are harder to recognize and treat. Some common mental health problems found in children include depression, anxiety, behavior disorders, and attention deficit hyperactivity disorder. When untreated, mental health disorders can lead to school failure, family conflicts, drug abuse, and violence which often play out in the school.

For optimal learning to take place, children not only need to be physically healthy but also mentally healthy so that their minds are receptive. Social and emotional development impacts a child's interactions with others, performance in school, motivation to learn and attitude about school and self. Mental health encompasses self esteem, confidence, motivation, and attitude. Children make choices daily that affect their mental health and are a reflection of their current mental health. How can schools promote healthy choices for children?

Schools that coordinate social and emotional development support services for students and families such as health education, parent education, and teacher training see increases in school connectedness and achievement that are reflected in better grades and related to reduced involvement in risk behaviors. Schools can:

- Promote staff wellness activities/ be good role models
- Give tips to encourage healthy practices in the home
- Share information with families and the community about social and emotional developmental stages
- Host a health fair
- Offer small group support sessions
- Provide referral information for community mental health services
- Train staff to recognize mental health concerns
- Establish a plan of action when mental health concerns are identified

The PPP Wellness Notebook provides several modules focusing on mental health including: self-esteem in children, self esteem in parents, handling personal stress, and understanding and dealing with stress in the family. These modules can be an asset to schools as they provide information to parents on an individual basis or through a workshop/group session setting. PPP can also come on site and provide staff development or

family workshops for your school on this topic. Schools and families can work together to help children make wise choices for healthy social and emotional development!

## UPCOMING EVENTS

- Children's Mental Health Awareness Week May 2-8 – visit the [National Federation of Families](#) website for information
- [PTA Teacher Appreciation](#) Week May 2-8
- [International Day of Families](#) May 15

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## UNDERSTANDING MENTAL HEALTH IN CHILDREN

by Shelly Lock, Program Development Coordinator

When your child has a fever, it is easy to identify the problem. A child's mental health problem may be harder to identify, but you can learn to recognize the symptoms. Mental health involves how people think, feel, and act as they face life's situations. It affects how people handle stress, relate to one another, and make decisions. Mental health influences the ways we look at ourselves, our lives, and others in their lives. Like physical health, mental health is important at every stage of life.

All aspects of children's lives, physical, intellectual, and social are affected by their mental health. It affects their attitude, self esteem, confidence and motivation. Children and adolescents can have mental health disorders that interfere with the way they think, feel, and act. When untreated, mental health disorders can lead to school failure, family conflicts, drug abuse, violence, and even suicide. Studies show that at least one in five children and adolescents have a mental health disorder.

What can parents do to help? Healthy social and emotional development can be promoted through educating children to help them make wise choices. Extra-curricular activities, friendships, television viewing, sleep habits, nutrition and exercise choices can all have an affect on mental health. For example, too much passive television viewing can lead to non-reflective thinking, poor decision making, and confusion between reality and make-believe. Sleep impacts: attention span, and ability to interact with others. Nutrition affects how ready the brain is to learn. We can help guide children to make healthy choices.

Parents can also help by educating themselves. Knowing warning signs is important. A variety of signs may point to mental health disorders or serious emotional disturbances in children or adolescents. Parents should pay attention to excessive anger, fear, sadness or anxiety. Sudden changes in your child's behavior can also tip you off to a problem. If your child has these feelings, experiences or behaviors, you should seek advice from a professional:

- Feel sad and hopeless for no reason, and these feelings do not go away.
- Feel very angry most of the time and crying a lot or overreacting to things.
- Feel worthless or guilty often.
- Feel anxious or worried often.
- Are extremely fearful or having unexplained fears.
- Constantly concerned about physical problems or physical appearance.
- Frightened that his or her mind either is controlled or is out of control.
- Showing declining performance in school.
- Losing interest in things once enjoyed.
- Experiencing unexplained changes in sleeping or eating patterns.
- Avoiding friends or family and wanting to be alone all the time.
- Experiencing suicidal thoughts.
- Poor concentration and is unable to think straight or make up his or her mind.
- An inability to sit still or focus attention.
- Worry about being harmed, hurting others, or doing something "bad".

- A need to wash, clean things, or perform certain routines hundreds of times a day, in order to avoid an unsubstantiated danger.
- Persistent nightmares.
- Using alcohol or other drugs.
- Eating large amounts of food and then purging, or abusing laxatives, to avoid weight gain.
- Violating the rights of others or constantly breaking the law without regard for other people.
- Doing things that can be life threatening.

It is important to get your child help and to get support for yourself. You can call the National Mental Health Information Center at 1-800-789-2647. Get information from hotlines, libraries, or other sources. Seek referrals from professionals and ask questions about treatments and services. Your school can serve as a tool for resource referral. Reach out for support for your child's mental health as you would reach out for a cure for a physical illness.

By educating ourselves and our children on factors that affect mental health and by getting support to promote mental health we can make a difference!