

Position Statement on Effective Parenting: Positive Support for Families

The National Association of School Psychologists recognizes that all families should receive positive support for appropriate and effective parenting and discipline of their children.

Parenting encompasses many roles and requires parents to be the first and primary teachers of basic life skills. This critical learning includes: *facts and basic skills* necessary to function in the world; *responsible independence* through training in problem solving and moral judgment; *creativity and passion* to give their life direction; and *self-discipline and perseverance* so that they can maintain the effort needed to accomplish their goals. Through the many years of children's growth and development, parents need to protect and manage their children and to provide appropriate models so that they can enjoy life and be productive while also acting appropriately. However, parents typically receive little or no training other than the casual observation of others or modeling the parenting styles they learned from their own parents. And, they are often removed from their extended families who could provide support, guidance, and respite from the stresses of raising children.

Because children spend a significant portion of their day at school, the educational community shares parents' interest in managing and protecting children, and teaching academic and other basic life skills, problem solving, creativity, and discipline. Discipline is a word that can make people uncomfortable because it is associated with punishment. However, the word *discipline* comes from the Latin word *disciplina*, which means "instruction" or "teaching." It defines a relationship where the parent is the teacher and their child is the student. Effective parenting is safe, nurturing and instructive. It is not a "hands-off" or unrestricted freedom approach that fosters a lack of respect for others or ignores the importance of persistence in work efforts. Nor is it a primarily negative or punitive approach that is emotionally, socially or physically harmful and is ineffective in fostering aggressive behavior. The National Association of School Psychologists supports the use of both verbal and nonverbal discipline practices that treat children with respect and shape children's thinking and behavior to encourage self-management, self-worth, caring for people, and other positive behaviors.

Fostering Development of Healthy Behavior

The National Association of School Psychologists believes that the following parenting practices help children to grow up mentally healthy and socially responsible, and prevent problem behaviors.

- **Developing a trusting relationship**
When children feel loved and respected by their parents, they simultaneously increase their self-confidence in their independent decision-making and also are more accepting and responsive to their parent's direction. Parents form trusting relationships with their children by being predictable and mature in their own behavior. Parents also foster trust by protecting their children from harm while

holding them responsible for the consequences while holding them responsible for the consequences of their own behavior (as is reasonable given their age and abilities). Children who feel safe to make mistakes can learn from them and make wiser decisions in the future. A trusting relationship is the cornerstone of both effective parental discipline and the development of self-discipline in the children.

- **Developing appropriate expectations**
Children need to understand their parents' expectations, and to believe that they can meet those expectations. The expectations must be appropriate for each child's age, abilities, and temperament. Children with learning, physical or behavioral disabilities provide additional challenges to parents who must adjust their expectations to their child's unique needs and developmental patterns.
- **Setting limits**
Limits can help children feel that the world is predictable, orderly and safe. Again, parents should consider each child's age and unique developmental factors when establishing limits, and review these limits regularly to adjust for their child's continuing maturity. Limits need to be explicitly and regularly communicated to children and should be enforced consistently. The consequences for challenging limits should be clear, appropriate, and when possible, natural and logical in relation to the offense.
- **Offering encouragement and recognition**
Supporting children's efforts and recognizing their positive behaviors will increase these behaviors. Planning, problem solving, discipline, positive action, self-restraint, and accomplishment are the basis for effective behavior management and should be abundantly encouraged and recognized by parents. Encouraging children to engage in self-evaluation that includes positive and realistic self-appraisal of their accomplishments and other behaviors will help children to develop robust self-management and to make better decisions when their parents are not available.

What School Psychologists Can Do to Promote Effective Parenting

The National Association of School Psychologists urges school psychologists to promote the development of effective parenting practices through the following activities:

- **Early intervention programs**
Home visitation programs and group presentations to parents of newborns, infants and young children are effective means of teaching and supporting parents in the difficult task of raising children. These programs provide parents with knowledge about normal development and realistic expectations. They can also train skills in fostering development and how to keep young children healthy and safe. School psychologists can partner with other professionals in developing and delivering these programs, and can take a leadership role in generating community support for them.
- **School-based programs to encourage effective parenting and discipline**
Peer mediation, conflict resolution, social skills training and counseling are all

proven ways to help children develop responsible behavior. These can be developed through regular communication with parents about these skills and by providing opportunities for parents to practice them with their children. Parents' participation can include informative meetings or printed materials sent home that inform them of the basic ideas of the programs and give the parents cues about how they can support, encourage, and incorporate the learning into home life. School psychologists can bring leadership, research, management and coaching skills to these programs.

- **Consultation with parents**

School psychologists have unique opportunities to talk with parents about development and discipline. As part of the consultation, school psychologists can provide parents with behavioral and developmental expectations appropriate to the child's age and abilities. They can also provide parents with methods for problem solving, behavior management, listening skills, and encouragement and recognition. Information about school, community, internet and other print and media resources can also be shared, as well as referrals to other specific community programs or professional services as needed.

- **Parent education classes**

School psychologists can provide parent training using a variety of research-supported parent education programs. They can help parents to develop positive approaches to behavior management including limit setting, use of recognition and reinforcement, giving effective directions, increasing the effectiveness and satisfaction in parent-child interactions, and using negotiation and mediation. School psychologists can also provide guidance to parents on school-related concerns such as homework, peer relationships, time management, and using report cards to evaluate progress and make plans for future accomplishments. They can also provide information and provide guidance as requested on related home management issues such as chores, allowance, dating, and employment while in school.

Summary

Raising emotionally healthy, self-confident, motivated and self-disciplined children is a challenge for parents. The National Association of School Psychologists encourages school psychologists and other professionals working with children and families to help parents to develop effective parenting and discipline practices that are positive, safe and instructive. School psychologists can help parents by supporting, developing and implementing school and community programs that build healthy parent-child relationships and strengthen the home to enable children to become caring, responsible and contributing members of society.

Resources

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Approved by the NASP Delegate Assembly, July 2006

Adopted by the CASP Board of Directors March 7, 2007