



Families are the cornerstone of society, and parents are the key to strong families. Through the teen years and beyond, parents' role remains unchanged—to love, protect and guide their children.

Supporting parents: Strong families form the foundation for strong communities

Why focus on parent education?

Parents can do their best when they get the support and resources they need at critical points in their lives. Family Living education programs focus on these influential times when parents can shape their child's development.

Consider this: Researchers have found that the benefits of a strong parent-child relationship in the early years carry over to the *next generation*. Children who experienced positive parenting at age two were themselves good parents to their own two-year-old children. **By supporting parents of young children**, Family Living programs reach parents at a crucial time.

Another opportune time to invest in parents is when families are **raising adolescents**. The human brain grows rapidly in the teen years, making it a key time for parents to learn the skills that will guide adolescents to make healthy decisions. While some programs that aim to reduce underage alcohol and drug use are focused on young people themselves, research shows that positive parenting and strong parent-child relationships more effectively steer teens away from risky behaviors. In fact, programs that change family dynamics, such as those delivered by Family Living, are nine times more effective than approaches focusing on individual youth.

Supporting parents and children through divorce and separation is another critical time to reach families. Children whose parents live apart face increased risk of behavior problems at school, a drop in school performance, and anxiety or depression. The good news is that research has identified the skills parents need to cooperate in a co-parenting relationship. Family Living educators help families to build those skills, encouraging parents to focus on co-parenting in ways that support their children as they adapt to a changing family structure.

Parent education— a good investment

Investing in parent education is a good return on taxpayer investment. Parents are the key to raising young people who will contribute to a strong society and a sound economy.

The following pages highlight the impacts of some of Family Living's most successful parent education programs.

Family Living Programs—Supporting parents of young children

Parenting newsletters

Parents like to learn in a variety of ways. Some prefer to learn in a group setting, while others would rather fit learning into their own time schedules. Family Living's *Parenting* newsletter project is a simple yet inexpensive and proven educational program that provides new parents with help and support right in their homes. The newsletter series introduces important parenting skills that promote healthy child development.

The first in the age-paced newsletter series, *Parenting the First Year*, has reached over *one-third of all Wisconsin families* with newborns since the program began over 25 years ago. And that reach is significant—*one in every 10 Wisconsin residents* was raised by a parent who received *Parenting* newsletters.

Studies reveal that parents who received *Parenting the First Year* newsletters have beliefs significantly less like those of child-abusing parents and reported hitting their babies significantly less often compared to those who did not. Estimates indicate that every dollar spent on this program results in a decrease of more than \$6 in future spending by the child welfare, health care, education, police and judicial systems.

For more information
 visit <http://parenting.uwex.edu>
 or contact Patti Herman
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 608-742-9686

Raising a Thinking Child

Ask parents how they would like their child to behave and the reply is often that they'd like the child to be more helpful, show self-control, be able to problem-solve, be less bossy and have fewer outbursts. These behaviors all hinge on a child's ability to think clearly and critically.

The skills needed for critical thinking, impulse control, problem-solving and conflict resolution can be taught early in life by young children's most influential teachers—their parents. Learning brain-building skills helps children develop into a productive next generation of employees, parents and community members.

Family Living offers *Raising a Thinking Child* to educate parents how to teach problem-solving skills to their young children at home. Research on the outcomes of this program showed that children were more socially adept and demonstrated better conflict resolution skills both at home, and later in school settings.

"There is much less yelling, arguing and fighting. I talk more WITH my children rather than just talking at them and telling them what to do."

Since 2007, *Raising a Thinking Child* has reached over 100 families in nine counties, with demonstrated success. The vast majority of parents reported:

- Increasing their own knowledge and skills; using these new skills to teach their children to evaluate solutions and alternatives; yelling and lecturing less; staying calm and listening more.
- Their children are better at problem-solving and anticipating the consequences of their actions; more aware of appropriate times to act; and have better coping skills when they don't "get their way."



For more information
<http://fyi.uwex.edu/rtcprogram>
 or contact Bridget Mouchon
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 608-328-9440

Family Living Programs—Supporting parents of adolescents

Strengthening Families Program for Parents and Youth 10-14

Consider a program that can help parents and children:

- Enjoy each other more and have more fun.
- Solve problems and arguments more easily.
- Communicate more effectively.

Family Living's *Strengthening Families Program for Parents and Youth 10-14* is such a program.

Parents and adolescents participate together in highly interactive sessions that improve parenting skills, build life skills in youth, and strengthen family bonds. Research shows that the *Strengthening Families Program* brings both health and economic benefits to youth, families and communities long after the program ends. Youth who participate in the program are less likely to use alcohol, tobacco and other drugs in the future and more likely to be better connected and successful in school. Parents who participate are better at monitoring their teens and guiding their behavior, and report having more positive feelings about their children.

As for communities, research has found that for every dollar spent on the *Strengthening Families Program*, \$9.60 is saved in future costs in the form of less jail and treatment time and lost future earnings. Since 2003, Family Living has trained nearly 600 people to facilitate the program in their communities.

To learn more about how you can bring the *Strengthening Families Program* to your community, visit <http://fyi.uwex.edu/strengthening-families> or contact Jane Schaaf jane.schaaf@ces.uwex.edu 608-326-0223

Digital parenting

The role of technology in children's lives has increased at an astonishing rate, leaving many parents scrambling to keep up. While valuable programs for parents focus on protecting children from the potential harms of digital media, few address its usefulness as a parenting tool.

Family Living programs help parents better understand how to use technology to parent more effectively. Educational programs offered by Family Living include *eParenting® High Tech Kids* and *Parenthetical*.

In 2014, over 3,100 parents participated in UW-Extension's digital parenting programs. They reported spending more time analyzing their parenting processes to increase their effectiveness and indicated that their parenting skills improved. Parents also increased their knowledge of how to integrate digital media into their parenting.

For more information about Digital Parenting programs offered through UW-Extension, contact Anne Clarkson anne.clarkson@ces.uwex.edu 608-206-6317



Family Living Programs— Supporting parents and children through divorce

At first it was a check-the-box thing for me – a requirement. Now I see the class as a MUST for all divorcing/separating families.

—Polk County participant

I think this class should be given to people when first married and maybe there wouldn't be so many divorces.

—Grant County participant



Divorce and separation are a common experience. Over 16,000 Wisconsin children experience their parents' divorce each year. Many other children experience the separation of their never-married parents, resulting in the same stresses and conflicts. Exposure to parental conflict is one of the major ways a break-up affects children.

For the past 20 years, Family Living has worked with family court commissioners and judges to conduct research-based educational programs for divorcing and separating parents to help them co-parent effectively. The programs help parents:

- Understand the impact of divorce or separation on their children.
- Acknowledge the important ongoing role each parent plays in their children's lives.
- Build the skills needed to successfully co-parent in the years ahead.

In the two-year period of 2013-2014, Family Living provided 268 co-parenting programs, reaching 3,000 parents (with over 2,400 children) in 19 Wisconsin counties. As a result of participating in the class, parents reported a reduction in inter-parental conflict and increased cooperation with the other parent.

Even parents who were court-mandated to participate in the course, many of whom were resentful and reluctant to attend, overwhelmingly agreed that the program "should be required for divorcing or separated parents." The majority indicated that they found the co-parenting class to be far more useful than other sources of information about parenting after divorce.

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Family Living programs make a difference by providing effective parent education that is accessible through trusted, community-based educators all across the state.

To learn more about how to offer a co-parenting program in your area visit <http://blogs.ces.uwex.edu/co-parenting> or contact Jane Schaaf jane.schaaf@ces.uwex.edu 608-326-0223

