

Raising Your Spirited Child

Fall 2001

Parent education curriculum developed and taught through UW-Extension have typically been based on normal child and adolescent development and behavior. In Pierce County, and across the state, family living educators are getting more questions and requests for information or workshops geared toward managing children with more challenging personalities and behaviors.

In response to those requests, this family living educator developed a series of seven lessons based on the best-selling book by Mary Sheedy-Kurcinka, "Raising Your Spirited Child." The curriculum links research on temperament to challenging behaviors and presents practical strategies for managing those behaviors.

Seven lessons were taught during four, 1 ½-hour sessions on consecutive Monday evenings beginning October 15, 2001 in Ellsworth. There was nearly 100% attendance rate for all fifteen participants (4 male, 11 female).

Thirteen of the 15 participants completed an evaluation based on what they learned over the four-week series. On a scale of one to five (with one being no understanding and 5 being a great deal of understanding) the following increase in knowledge was reported:

Their understanding of the effects of their child's temperament on his/her behavior increased from 2.8 to 4.5.

Their understanding of the effects of their own temperament on their reaction to their child's behavior increased from 2.8 to 4.7.

Their understanding of the cues leading up to their child's challenging behavior increased from 2.2 to 4.5.

Their understanding of strategies they could use for reducing power struggles increased from 2.6 to 4.6.

Their understanding of strategies they could use when dealing with tantrums and blow-ups when they did occur increased from 3.0 to 4.3.

When asked what was the most important thing you learned about your child during the course of the classes, responses included: To notice cues ahead of time and help your child through their struggle; Why he acts and behaves the way he does at certain times; That she really is sensitive, she's not just trying to bug me; How his fear can be the source of misbehavior; I learned that a lot of the insecurities of him wanting to be held or sat by at bedtime, etc. are okay – and I take more time to understand him and hold him.

When asked what was the most important thing they learned about themselves during the course of the classes, the following responses were documented: I am not alone and it isn't my fault;

how my reaction to her outburst fuel her stormy tantrums; how I react influences the situation and results; I am an intense person; Even though I have somewhat understood the spirited child, I have not handled many situations correctly – have been too strict in dealing with many situations.

Some responses to naming a new idea you plan to use for managing your child's challenging behavior included: Don't force him to do things my way all the time; One word commands (works!). Work on teaching manners; Letting him know ahead of time – it has worked so well making limits clear; My plan is to be more positive. I was referring to his behavior so negatively as were others around me.

When asked to identify one new idea that they had already used to manage challenging behavior, they listed the following responses: I picked up on a cue and rubbed her back, held her when we went to church and there was loud music – I helped her calm down; Being calm when he is intense; To use humor to diffuse a tense situation or avert a blow-up; Reminding them of their successes; Have stopped saying don't so often; Be more sensitive to his sensitivities.