

Raising Your Spirited Child (Spring and Fall 2002) Success Story

Parent education curriculum developed and taught through UW-Extension has 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," in the summer of 2001. The curriculum links research on temperament to challenging behaviors and presents practical strategies for managing those behaviors.

Seven lessons were taught during four, 2-hour sessions on consecutive Mondays in the spring and fall of 2002. Eleven men and 17 women attended one of the three workshops offered in Ellsworth or River Falls.

Sixteen of the 28 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 2.6 to 4.2.

Their understanding of the effects of their own temperament on their reaction to their child's behavior increased from 2.6 to 4.2.

Their understanding of the cues leading up to their child's challenging behavior increased from 2.8 to 4.2.

Their understanding of strategies they could use for reducing power struggles increased from 2.4 to 3.8.

Their understanding of strategies they could use when dealing with tantrums and blow-ups when they did occur increased from 2.7 to 3.9.

When asked what was the most important thing you learned about your child during the course of the classes, responses included: To listen and be more open to their feelings; What a unique individual she is – that by having a better understanding of this uniqueness, I will not become as angry; I learned that my child will listen if they believe they are being listened to, and that what they feel is just as important; I thought I could change these behaviors by telling him what he's doing wrong. Now I know I can help him understand himself and maybe go about things a different way.

When asked what was the most important thing they learned about themselves during the course of the classes, the following responses were documented: That my rigid "just set boundaries and

be consistent” stance may not be the best strategy for all situations. There is value in this approach in some situations – but other strategies may be more effective for dealing with some behaviors; That I can interpret what my child is feeling, and that I can control how I react; That I’m a lot more like my kids than I thought; That I am not personally responsible for my child’s behavior.

Some responses to naming a new idea you plan to use for managing your child’s challenging behavior included: To do some calming activities with her; Don’t rush bedtime; I like the idea of teaching the child how to cope with his behavior, rather than us trying to cope with him; Find positive outlets for his intensity – jumping, dancing, swinging, exercise; Negotiation to avoid tantrums; Giving them choices instead of telling them to do one thing; I’m going to try humor with my kids when they’re mad and upset about something.

When asked to identify one new idea that they had already used to manage challenging behavior, they listed the following responses: Treat each child according to the situation – don’t try to play fair; Say stop instead of no; Using deep-breathing techniques to calm down when tension escalates; To be more flexible with day-to-day routines; Recognizing good behavior in her; We established some simple house rules and posted them on the refrigerator. We decreased allowed TV time and set a more definite bedtime; Identifying when a situation has the potential for melt down and identifying the source of the melt down through talking with my child and validating their feelings; Anticipating cues leading up to behavior. Use one word commands.