

Parenting: The First Three Years A Group-Based Positive Parenting Program

by Juvata Rusch, MA, MS, and Laura Backen Jones, PhD

Review by Mary K Rothbart, PhD

Adverse events in childhood have been linked to later addiction, disease, disability, and early death,¹ suggesting the importance to public health of programs supporting parents and families in the early years. The Birth To Three organization, founded in Eugene, Oregon in 1978, provides support groups and dissemination of scientifically validated information on child development to new parents. Birth To Three has now served many thousands of parents in the US and abroad. Parents learn how to raise competent and caring children in a socially supportive environment. With Birth To Three's recent publication of *Parenting: The First Three Years*, other organizations and communities can implement this novel and exciting approach to improving the early lives of children. Pediatric services, health prevention programs, hospital and home nursing services, community parent education and extension services will all benefit from this support-group-based curriculum.

Parenting: The First Three Years is a user-friendly package made available through Parenting Now!, a division of Birth To Three. The curriculum, written by two parent educators and carefully reviewed and edited by both developmental scientists and cultural review committees, includes guides for parent educators, booklets for parents, and illustrative videos/DVDs for each of three age-graded programs (the "Incredible INFANTS," "Wonderful ONES," and "Terrific TWOS," with ten sessions in each program). Meeting plans are provided for each session, allowing parents to learn from other parents and from the scientific literature, and from observations of and interactions with their own and other children.

Parent groups in the program are set up according to the date of a child's birth; each group includes a broad range of parental socio-economic status, culture, and education and both mothers and fathers enjoy the program. Infants attend meetings with their parents, and ones and twos play in a separate room. A major

Parents learn how to raise competent and caring children in a socially supportive environment.

goal of the program is to respect diverse cultural backgrounds and values. Within this atmosphere, parents are guided toward understanding their child's developmental stages and individual temperament, and how their values can be implemented in a problem-solving framework. The support group aspect of *Parenting: The First Three Years* is critical. There are no lectures, and parents often model problem solutions for other parents. In Birth To Three, most parent groups have continued to meet well beyond the program years, with some continuing even after their children have graduated from high school or college.

The curriculum includes materials for parent educators and information on how to set up a new program.

The *Parent Educator Guide* covers a broad set of topics, ranging from the program's philosophical underpinnings to how to develop group process skills. There are background notes on each session's topics, discussion questions, exercises, information on what to expect, and a script that can be adapted to the group. The curriculum includes a four-minute overview video to be used with sponsoring groups or agencies, funding sources, and potential parent participants. When further questions arise, the Birth To Three organization is available for consultation.

It is not possible to convey the full richness of this program, other than suggesting that you examine materials from the package. *Parenting: The First Three Years* can provide either a well-developed, stand-alone service or an exciting component of a broader program. The curriculum is available through www.parentingnow.net. ♦

Reference

1. Felitti VJ, Anda RF, Nordenberg D, et al. Relationship of childhood abuse and household dysfunction to many of the leading causes of death in adults. The Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACE) Study. *Am J Prev Med* 1998 May;14(4):245-58.



Eugene (OR): Birth To Three Parenting program available on the Internet at www.parentingnow.net

Mary K Rothbart, PhD, is a Distinguished Professor of Psychology, Emerita at the University of Oregon in Eugene. E-mail: mary-roth@uoregon.edu.