

## ABSTRACT

Title of Dissertation: **AN EVALUATION OF BEST FAMILIES, A PARENTING EDUCATION INTERVENTION PROGRAM FOR HEAD START FAMILIES: THE EFFECTS ON CHILD-REARING STYLE, AFFIRMING COMMUNICATION, AND CHILDREN'S BEHAVIOR.**

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EDHD

The purpose of this study was to evaluate the effects of parents' participation in the Best Families program on the parents' child rearing style, parent-child communication, and parents' and teachers' ratings of the children's behavior. The Best Families program was a four-week, parenting education program designed specifically for economically disadvantaged parents of 4 – 5 year old children enrolled in early childhood assistance programs in a mid-Atlantic state. Thirty parent volunteers whose children attended a Head Start summer session at one of three Head Start centers participated in the study. Two of the parent participants were fathers, and 28 were mothers. Nineteen of the parents were African American, eight were Hispanic Americans, and three were Caucasian. Nineteen of the participants were parents of boys, and eleven of the participants were parents of girls. The Best Families program included four components: social problem solving, verbalizing

emotions, parent-child communication, and utilization of social support. The program was delivered once a week for four consecutive weeks. Participants were directed to apply the skills that had been addressed during the following week and to discuss with the group the relative success of the strategies. Personal interviews were conducted prior to the intervention program and immediately after participation in the parenting education program. A participant's child-rearing style and social problem solving was measured by the Child Rearing Style Interview (Shure, 1998). All but one of the 30 participants moved up the child rearing style continuum in the direction of a social problem solving style. Parent-child communication was measured by the Problem Solving Communication Index (McCubbin, McCubbin, and Thompson, 1988). There was a statistically significant increase in the frequency of affirming communication. Children's behavior was measured by parent and teacher ratings using the Achenbach Child Behavior Checklist (Achenbach & Edelbrock, 1983). There was a statistically significant reduction in the frequency of externalizing behaviors of both boys and girls as rated both by parents' and by teachers' ratings. The children exhibited fewer aggressive and impulsive behaviors and generally were more compliant.

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ON CHILD-REARING STYLE, AFFIRMING COMMUNICATION, AND  
CHILDREN'S BEHAVIOR

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## Dedication

I would like to dedicate this manuscript to my father.

## Acknowledgements

I am forever grateful to my family for their unwavering support during these many years of doctoral work. I am especially thankful to my husband, Al, for his “tried and tested” support, love, and understanding during these most difficult years. I want to thank my children, Deborah and Pamela, for being patient when I was distracted and providing support when it was needed. I am also thankful for my nephew, Scott, for his encouragement, support, and assistance when needed.

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# Chapter 1

## Introduction

This chapter will present 1) background information, 2) a pilot program, 3) the intervention program, Best Families, 4) rationale for the study, 5) purpose of the study, 6) research questions, 7) significance of the study, 8) definition of terms, and 9) a chapter summary.

## Background Information

Family involvement is one key to a child's level of success in the educational system in the United States. Children are at greater risk of academic failure when their parents provide little intellectual stimulation and are disengaged from their school experiences (Webster-Stratton, 1998). Teachers rate family support as a significant prospective predictor of students' competencies (Dubow, Tisak, Hryshko, & Reid, 1991). Poor children enrolled in federally and state funded early childhood education assistance programs are at higher than average risk for early academic difficulties. Since family involvement was one key to help children to perform better in school, facilitating home and school cooperation might increase the academic success of educationally at-risk children in the early childhood assistance programs. Adoption of a systems approach to early childhood education intervention programs seemed warranted.

Consequently, federally funded early childhood educational intervention programs mandate a minimum of two parent training sessions per year (HHS Poverty

Guidelines, 1999), but two parent training sessions per year seemed insufficient to effect a change in parenting skills. Although parent education programs are offered to these economically disadvantaged parents, many early childhood educational intervention programs struggle with low levels of parental participation. There were undoubtedly many reasons that participation in these parent education programs was limited - lack of interest, parents' work schedules, lack of child care, transportation, time of day of the program, and competing demands, e.g., other children's activities. Despite policy maker's recognition of the contribution of parental involvement to children's academic success, parenting education in these programs frequently received minimal attention. Moreover, the effectiveness of the mandated parent education component of early childhood assistance programs has been studied infrequently. In addition, little was known about the content of such parenting education programs or about the adoption of recommended parenting principles by these parents since formal program evaluations of these parenting programs seldom were undertaken.

Most parenting programs were developed for middle class parents who generally have a higher level of formal education and who seek information to solve existing problems or to prevent parent-child conflict (Halpern, 1990). The structure of most parenting programs assumes that parents function on a formal operational cognitive level and know how to apply the knowledge that they are given in formal training programs. Economically disadvantaged parents may function on a different cognitive developmental level and do not appear to derive the same level of benefit from these programs or self-directed resources as middle class parents (Halpern, 1990).

& Ogbu, 1985). Economically disadvantaged parents need the same information as middle class parents; however, a component that provided additional skills that assisted parents to apply the information that was presented and to practice these new skills was needed.

Economically disadvantaged parents are likely to have less formal education and are more likely to feel uncomfortable in traditional classroom settings. Because involvement in their child's education required communication and occasionally conflict resolution skills, parents needed to develop these skills to become effective advocates for their children. Economically disadvantaged parents also were more likely to adopt an authoritarian style of childrearing (Baumrind, 1991), and their disciplinary strategies tend to be more punitive (Chase-Lansdale, Brooks-Gunn, & Zamsky, 1994). Not infrequently the practices recommended in parent education programs conflicted with the parents' authoritarian parenting style. Therefore, to adopt the recommended parenting principles many economically disadvantaged parents must change their belief system (Halpern, 1990 & Baumrind, 1991). A more integrated approach to parent education which included an experiential component and the application of problem solving concepts assisted this particular group of parents to develop and to implement better parenting practices.

Because they are living in poverty, children in early childhood assistance programs are more likely to be exposed to combinations of risk factors that have been associated with subsequent emotional and behavioral disorders (Rutter, 1979; Yoshikawa, 1995; & Piotrkowski, Collins, Knitzer, & Robinson, 1994). McLoyd (1990) provided compelling evidence that the chronically stressful life conditions

associated with poverty increase psychological distress among parents. Such distress can diminish effective parenting, with subsequent negative consequences for the social-emotional development of children. Faced with persistent financial concerns and other stressors, economically disadvantaged parents show less nurturance, less responsiveness to the social-emotional needs of their children, and more reliance on physical punishment and coercion to gain obedience than middle income parents do. This pattern of parenting has been associated with risk for academic failure, behavior problems in school, and interpersonal problems with peers (Garner, Jones, & Miner, 1994 & Baumrind, 1991).

The importance of parents' affect, communication and problem solving skills as influences on their children's behavior was highlighted in the research literature. Amato & Ochiltree (1986) in their summary of this research found a variety of parental behaviors to be associated with child competence:

- The parents' ability to interact with their environment
- Parents who encourage their children to explore and to interact with the environment
- The parents' ability to use an active problem solving approach to resolving conflict
- Parental communication skills which create an environment that is less likely to have overt conflict among family members.

These attributes are associated with one's ability to solve problems and to communicate effectively.

When they were children, these economically disadvantaged parents may have

experienced negative parental attitudes, harsh parenting styles, and little parental support, which they, in turn, may adopt as their own parenting practices (Simons, Whitbeck, Conger, & Chyi-In, 1991). A parent's knowledge is affected by culture, family, and generation which then influences his or her behavior (Bronfenbrenner, 1990). For example, a mother whose family has excessively high or low expectations of children may treat her child differently from a mother who receives more appropriate expectations from her family. A mother's knowledge often is based on her mother's knowledge (Holloway, 1997).

Adaptations of parent education programs designed for middle class, affluent, educated parents, who are more likely to adopt an authoritative parenting style, are unlikely to meet the needs of these economically disadvantaged parents. With little exposure to higher levels of formal education and less intellectually stimulating environments, many economically disadvantaged parents employ many of the same parenting practices, which appear to be less effective and many times harsh, that were modeled for them by their parents. Their legacy of few resources, backgrounds of inadequate nurturing and affirmation, limited knowledge or acceptance of alternative child-rearing styles, are associated, many times, with the belief that different strategies for raising their children and coping with life's hassles are ineffective or spoil the child (Halpern, 1990). In addition, such parent education programs - Dare to Discipline (Dobson, 1990) & Assertive Parenting (Canter and Canter, 1993) when they are delivered to economically disadvantaged parents, are too often prescriptive and dogmatic. One possible reason that typical parent training programs fail to produce improvements in some families' functioning, coping, and communication

may be that their focus was too narrow and too concrete, they include what action a parent should take when their child misbehaves, for example: when Sarah does ‘this’, you do ‘that.’ However, these programs fail to integrate the training in a manner that would alter parents’ behavior, knowledge, or implementation.

In order to develop an effective parent education program that assisted these parents to develop an understanding of their children’s behavior and to be motivated to change their parenting style from an authoritarian-power assertion to a social problem solving style, we needed to understand and to consider their particular needs or life circumstances (Bronfenbrenner, 1990 & Ogbu, 1987). To model socially appropriate behaviors for their children, parents needed practice to implement a different approach to interpersonal communication, problem-solving techniques, and the development of support systems. Parenting education programs needed to include an emotional self-regulation component to enable parents to gain a comprehensive understanding of themselves and a social problem solving skills component so that they could analyze a problem and apply the principles of a social problem solving approach to find a solution. Inclusion of such components would assist parents to implement a social problem solving approach with their children effectively, which reduced the impact of several of the risk factors identified for impoverished children, primarily academic failure (Chase-Lansdale, Brooks-Gunn, & Zamsky, 1994). The purpose of this study was to evaluate the effect of the Best Families program on parents’ child-rearing styles, parent-child communication, and parents’ and teachers’ ratings of the children’s behavior. Social problem solving is necessary for the successful resolution of everyday interpersonal problems and people of all ages need

social problem solving skills to deal effectively with others (Goleman, 1995).

Research indicated that social problem solving skills correlated highly with social competence and positive peer relations that were important for successful adjustment in life (Denham, Zoller, & Couchoud, 1994). Social problem-solving programs can be successfully implemented with children aged 2-7 years (Durlak and Wells, 1997).

Most interpersonal problem-solving programs have been influenced by Spivack and Shure's (1974) conceptual framework that views social problem solving skills as an important part of adjustment. Although programs vary in which specific skills are targeted, these programs generally attempt to teach children how to use cognitively based skills to identify interpersonal problems and to develop effective means of resolving such difficulties (Durlak and Wells, 1997).

The I Can Problem Solve Program (ICPS) (Shure, 1992) was used in some early childhood educational settings as part of the curriculum for children between the ages of 4 and 7 years. Shure (1997) noted that even very young children can learn to solve everyday interpersonal problems by using the social problem solving approach as described in the ICPS program.

Shure's (1996) Raising a Thinking Child (RTC) book was an outgrowth of the I Can Problem Solve (ICPS) program (Shure, 1992) and was designed for use by parents with their children. Some examples of parent-child problems to be solved were: the child demands that his/her needs be met immediately; the child whines; the child interrupts you while you are on the phone. This social problem solving child-rearing style provided an opportunity for a parent and child to practice solving these everyday types of problems. There was little research available relating to the RTC

program. The RTC program was a book designed for parents to use with their children.

### Pilot Program

A pilot program using the material in Shure's (1994) Raising a Thinking Child book was completed in 1998 with economically disadvantaged parents of 44 young children at four federally funded early childhood education intervention sites. This program consisted of one-2 hour session each week for 4 weeks. Parents were taught how to teach their children the problem solving strategies outlined by Shure (1995). The parents were given homework to do with their children to reinforce the concepts that were taught, and were requested to report back to the group on their challenges and successes when doing the activities with their child. Social problem solving strategies were modeled for the parents using the suggested activities, games and materials in the RTC Workbook. Each week the parents were introduced to a different principle of social problem solving. The first week the language of problem solving was introduced. The language of social problem solving is learning to use words that convey choice, alternatives, evaluation, and consequences. The second week awareness of your own and other's feelings was presented. The third week exploring alternative solutions was the theme, and the fourth week the consequences of choosing various alternatives were discussed. Each week the steps in acquisition of a social problem solving approach to parenting were illustrated with frequently encountered parent-child conflicts.

Shure's (1998) Child-Rearing Style Interview was used to measure the impact

of the program. Shure (1998) delineated five childrearing styles:

- Level One - Power Assertion - the lowest level of communication which is characterized by threats, commands, demands, time-out, belittling, name-calling, spanking - any negative communication. Also in this category are statements of child non-involvement, as, “Don’t worry, “I’ll talk to your teacher about it” when, for example a child comes home from school and says: “Tommy hit me.” Now the child doesn’t have to think about the problem at all; his mother will solve it for him.
- Level Two - Positive Alternatives - this style tells a child what to do without any explanations. For example: “Share your toys,” or, “Ask your brother for what you want,” “wait ‘till I’m finished,” “toys belong in your bedroom (when left on the living room floor).
- Level Three - Simple Explanations/moral overtones - this style tells a child what to do with simple explanations that involve moral overtones. For example: “We don’t hit our friends,” “Was that the nice thing to do?”
- Level Four - Induction/Reasoning/Explanation - The fourth level of communication is the level where most adults function, particularly in their communication with children. This style again tells a child what to do with explanations which can include feelings. Some examples are: “You might hurt your brother if you hit him,” “You won’t have any friends if you grab toys,” Someone will get hurt if you leave your

toys here.” Or with the addition of feelings, “I feel angry when …”

“You’re making me angry …” “Your brother feels angry when …”

- Level Five - Problem Solving: This style involves the use of ICPS dialoguing which is asking, not telling, children what or what not to do. ICPS dialoguing consists of questions to gain information. Some questions are: What happened? What’s the problem? How do you think he/she felt when that happened? What happened next? How did that make you feel? and What else could you do?

Parent’s responses on Shure’s (1998) Child-Rearing Style Interview changed from demanding, commanding and telling the child what and what not to do - Power Assertion, Level One Child-Rearing Style, to telling with an explanation, which is Level Three, but only two of the forty four parents achieved the highest Level Child-Rearing Style – Level Five, Problem Solving. Despite this evidence of the effectiveness of the parenting program, some limitations became evident. It was difficult for most of these parents to apply consistently the concepts they were being asked to teach their children. It became evident that parents were being asked to teach their children problem solving skills that the parents themselves had not been taught. The parenting strategies typically used did not include helping a child to solve problems, nor did parents use social problem solving strategies in their own lives. These parents had difficulty abandoning their usual and preferred approach of telling their child what he or she should or should not do. The parents had difficulty communicating with their children in a positive manner and assisting their children to reflect on their behavior to develop problem solving skills. It became clear that the

adults themselves frequently lacked the social problem solving skills they were expected to teach their children. To be more effective, additional adult components to address these gaps in the social problem solving and communication skills of these parents needed to be added to the parenting education intervention. These components included adult issues in social problem solving, verbal expression of emotion, parent-child communication, and social support. Best Families program was developed and consisted of four components: Social Problem Solving, Verbalizing Emotions, Parent-child Communication, and Social Support.

### Best Families

Drawing on the legacy of Shure (1992, 1995), using strategies proposed by Elias, Tobias, & Friedlander (1999), a revised or second generation parenting education program, Best Families, was developed. Deficits in social problem solving skills are related to poor adjustment in elementary school children (Tisdale & St. Lawrence, 1986). Dubow, Tisak, Causey, Hryshko, & Reid (1991) found that problem solving was directly related to teacher and parent ratings of children's behavioral adjustment and grade point averages. Individuals who can think in a problem solving fashion are believed to be more successful and to be adjusted better socially than those who have not learned to think this way. The development of social problem solving skills creates ongoing opportunities for mutually satisfying experiences with children, peers and other adults. Such skills are personal resources rather than resources that must be provided by others (Halpern, 1990); therefore it was likely that parents, as well as children, would use these skills to obtain successful

outcomes across situations. The goal of the proposed Best Families program was to reinforce parents' efforts to foster social problem solving within their families, particularly with their children, and interpersonal communication. This program also provided parents with practical ways to teach these necessary skills to their children.

Social problem solving was the first component of the Best Families program and was used to assist parents to identify and to develop strategies for handling daily problems through the use of appropriate problem solving language, to develop an awareness of their own feelings and those of others, to generate alternative solutions, to consider the consequences of each alternative solution and to choose appropriate solutions. Shure's (1998) Child-Rearing Style Interview was used to measure the social problem solving component of the program.

According to Denham, Zoller, & Couchoud (1994), emotions function as vital regulators of children's intra- and interpersonal behavior. Children learn much from their parents regarding the nature of emotional expressions and situations (Halberstadt, 1991), and parents' own expressions of emotions may teach children indirectly about emotions. Parental emotional expressiveness and its intensity are associated with individual differences in children's understanding of emotions. Emotion-related parental didactic practices, such as the use of emotion laden explanations in disciplinary encounters or general conversation, relate to the child's understanding of emotions (Denham, et al., 1994). How parents react to children's emotions also contributes to children's understanding of emotion.

A second component, verbalizing emotions, was added to the Best Families program. Elias, Tobias, & Friedlander's (1999) book, Emotionally Intelligent

Parenting, addressed the role of emotional regulation in the reduction of family conflict and daily hassles and was designed for use by professionals. Best Families program was based on the principles of emotional regulation, which serve as goals for parents and children which have been adapted from Goleman (1995) and Elias et al. (1999). Best Families program taught parents to develop an awareness of their own and the feelings of others, to show empathy, and to develop an understanding of others' points of view; to regulate and cope positively with emotional and behavioral impulses; to develop positive goals and plans; and to use social problem solving skills in handling interpersonal relationships.

The third component, parent-child communication, of the Best Families program was considered a significant factor in determining the quality of parent-child relationships. Each conversation an individual has provides an opportunity for that individual to promote goals, to increase learning and to develop relationships (Harkins, 1999). Parent-child communication appears to be significantly related to a child's behavior and the degree of social competence a child achieves. Clear communication that moves toward desired results is not innate but can be developed. Best Families program was designed to assist parents to develop effective communication strategies. Appropriate and effective parent-child communication was addressed in this component of the Best Families program. The Family Problem Solving Communication Index (FPSC) (McCubbin, M., McCubbin, H. & Thompson, 1988) was used to measure any change in parent-child communication.

The final component added to the Best Families program was social support. Participants were encouraged to participate in a “buddy” system during the first

session of the Best Families program, which was used as a model for participants to develop other social relationships. These relationships provided support and encouragement to the participants to try new strategies and skills within their individual families. The group members maintained contact both during and after the program. Their experience with the ‘buddy’ system would give the participants a model for developing other supportive relationships. Networking within the group was ongoing to assist participants to develop and to maintain supportive relationships. Best Families program provided pertinent information to participants for accessing available resources within the community when needed.

Best Families program was developed specifically for low-income parents with children enrolled in the federally or state funded early childhood education intervention programs. This program consisted of teaching the parents: basic social problem solving strategies, labeling and verbalizing emotions, appropriate and effective parent-child communication, and developing support systems. Self-assessment, modeling, role playing followed by feedback and reinforcement, self-control strategies, and simulations of common parent-child problems were included in the sessions. Parents were asked to identify and to present a parent-child conflict they experienced in their home. The group discussed strategies for resolving the conflict, provided feedback and reinforcement to the parent who chose one of the suggested strategies for use at home. Parents were taught how to implement these strategies in their homes and were introduced to methods for teaching these problem solving and communication skills to their children. It was proposed that such a program would assist parents to develop and to implement a social problem solving approach to child

rearing. The objective of the Best Families program was to add greater meaning, comprehension, and effectiveness to parents' use of social problem solving strategies and communication skills within their own lives as well as in their parenting practices.

Authoritarian style child-rearing appears to be the preferred style of most economically disadvantaged families. Most of these parents believe that other styles of child-rearing result in disrespect, defiance, and little, if any, parental control. Many parents believe that this style of parenting is the only manner in which they can teach their children to survive in their communities (Halpern, 1990). Some assumptions must be made if we are to persuade these families to change their beliefs and to adopt the recommended parenting principles of the Best Families program:

- The child needs to have as much control over his or her life as would be age appropriate.
- The child is responsible for his or her own behavior.
- Parent and child should participate in a goal directed partnership.
- Decision making should be shared by parent and child in age appropriate situations and parents should encourage children to take control of decision making in age appropriate areas.
- Parents need to teach children how to make decisions.
- Parents should permit children to make mistakes and to learn to evaluate consequences.

Baumrind (1989) identified three prototypic patterns of parental authority - authoritative, authoritarian, and permissive - and the type of child associated with

each pattern. Parents who used a combination of high control and positive encouragement of the child's autonomous and independent striving associated with optimal competence she identified as authoritative. Parents of children who, relative to others, were discontented, withdrawn, and distrustful were themselves detached and controlling and somewhat less warm than the other parents and were identified as authoritarian. Noncontrolling, nondemanding and relatively warm parents had children who were the least self-reliant, explorative, and self-controlled and were identified by Baumrind (1989) as permissive.

### Rationale

Parenting skills for most parents, particularly economically disadvantaged parents, are generally limited to guesswork and replication of the parenting practices of their own parents (Gordon, 1969). Often these parents employ autocratic, monosyllabic communication with their young children coupled with harsh parenting practices (Gordon, 1969; Dodge, Pettit, & Bates, 1994). Many of these parents have not had the opportunity to develop the skills that growing up in a positive, nurturing, and opportunity rich environment provides.

Many economically disadvantaged families have multiple and intense needs. A survey of 117 Head Start programs, conducted by the Office of the Inspector General, to identify the challenges of serving these families, found that substance abuse, lack of parenting skills, child abuse, domestic violence, and inadequate housing were the most frequently identified problems. (Piotrkowski, Collins, Knitzer, & Robinson, 1994). Many times children of poor families have communication

problems, act in a passive-aggressive fashion, and are singularly non-communicative (McLoyd, 1990). Frequently these children are from single parent families, which may be dysfunctional. Many of these children are parented by teen mothers who reside in a multigenerational household with little or no means of supporting themselves or ways of completing their education. Teenage motherhood is associated with low levels of education, limited employment opportunities, single parent households, welfare dependency, poverty status, inappropriate parenting and sub-optimal child-rearing environments (Hofferth, 1987). Frequently, the grandmothers provide most of the child guidance. (Chase-Lansdale, Brooks-Gunn, & Zamsky, 1994) Welfare reform has brought increased demands to such households, which translates into more stress in these families and the potential for child neglect or abuse has been increased greatly.

There was a compelling need for a program that highlighted the impact of parents' problem solving skills, parents' emotional regulation, and the relationship between the parents' communication with their child and their child's behavior. Many of these parents had low levels of formal education and thus had not developed the skills to evaluate their own behavior in a critical manner, nor had they developed the skills and abilities involved in resolving their own issues much less those needed to rear their children using a problem solving approach. Best Families program was created to assist parents to develop effective social problem solving strategies.

These skills and abilities were associated with more positive parent-child relationships, as well as other interpersonal relationships (Goleman, 1995). Best Families program information was presented in a style that encouraged parents to

participate in the training sessions, and to practice new skills and strategies presented within the safety and support of the group. This type of approach encouraged parents to try new skills within their individual environments. They reported to the group about what worked for them, what challenges they encountered, and received constructive feedback from the group. The intent of this program was first to provide parents with strategies and opportunities to explore their feelings, communication styles, and social problem solving strategies, to become more effective social problem solvers and communicators, and to teach these skills to their children.

It was believed that such an approach assisted parents to develop appropriate and effective social problem solving strategies, positive parent-child communication skills and to implement this program in their individual environments. This approach to parenting education provided poor families with options that previously were not considered. Through such training, education, and support, parents would be able to rear strong, competent children who were able to generate solutions and to engage in consequential thinking for non-violent alternatives to problems.

### Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to evaluate the effect of the Best Families program on parents' child-rearing styles, parent-child communication, and parents' and teachers' ratings of the children's behavior. The Best Families program was a four part parent education program, designed specifically for economically disadvantaged parents of 4 - 5 year old children enrolled in early childhood assistance programs in a mid-Atlantic state.

Knowledge derived from this study contributed to the enhancement of parenting practices, parent participation in the early childhood assistance programs, and increased collaboration between parents and schools. Therefore findings about the impact of the Best Families program were of primary relevance to the accomplishment of better policy development concerning parenting education within impoverished communities and early childhood assistance programs.

### Research Questions

This study addressed the following research questions:

#### Research Question 1

Did participation in the Best Families program affect the level of the parents' Child-Rearing Style as measured by Shure's (1995) Child-Rearing Style Interview?

#### Research Question 2

Did participation in the Best Families program increase affirming communication as measured by the Family Problem Solving Communication Index (McCubbin, M., McCubbin, H., & Thompson, 1988)?

#### Research Question 3

Were parents who participated in the Best Families parenting education workshop satisfied with the program as measured by the Parent Satisfaction Questionnaire?

#### Research Question 4

Was there a change in parents' ratings of their children's behavior problems at home as measured by the Child Behavior Checklist (Achenbach & Edelbrock, 1983)?

#### Research Question 5

Was there a change in teacher's ratings of the children's behavior problems in school as measured by the Teacher Report Form (Achenbach & Edelbrock, 1986) after their respective parents' had participated in the Best Families program?

#### Significance of the Study

Education, social support, and the enhancement of social competencies promote strong, competent individuals. Early childhood is a formative period of life and children can be placed at risk if denied proper nourishment, care, and developmental opportunities (Albee and Gullotta, 1997). Certain situations or experiences can increase the risk that an individual will suffer from emotional and psychological problems particularly if their social problem solving skills are inadequate (Priester & Clum, 1993). Economically disadvantaged families tend to have less investment in their children and less family involvement places these children at greater risk of academic failure. The environmental stressors associated with poverty create feelings of powerlessness and helplessness and often lead to maladaptive behavior patterns which reduce an individual's ability to respond effectively to problem situations (Weikert & Schweinhart, 1997; Priester & Clum, 1993). A growing literature establishes the fact that children can be helped through the development of social problem solving skills to succeed in school and to avoid

such dysfunctional behaviors as substance abuse and aggression (Goleman, 1995; Elias Tobias, & Friedlander, 1999; & Shure, 1992, 1994, 1995,1997).

The Best Families program consisted of four components to assist economically disadvantaged parents' to become more effective problem solvers and to gain a more comprehensive understanding of their behaviors. The program assisted parents to develop of critical thinking skills and they were taught strategies for teaching these concepts and related skills to their children. Subsequently it was believed that the parents participating in this study would be able to analyze a problem and to apply the principles of a social problem solving approach to an appropriate resolution. With appropriate and effective tools and strategies, parents were able to deal with everyday problems better and to rear their children in a non-violent and social problem solving fashion. Parents were able to teach and to model effective strategies for their children to navigate their environment and to experience greater success in the academic arena as well as with interpersonal relationships.

Parenting education programs need to adopt a systems approach with strong implementation components, which are believed critical to the success of social problem-solving education programs (Durlak and Wells, 1997). Parenting education program implementation-outcome was considered a complex, purposeful, negotiated and restrained set of activities, which may have different meanings and consequences for different populations (Trickett, 1997).

Child misbehavior is associated with inappropriate problem solving skills (Goleman, 1995; Elias, M. J., Ubriaco, M., & Gray, J. 1985; Elias, M. J., Gara, M., Rothbaum, P. A., Reese, A. M., & Ubriaco, M. 1987; Elias, Tobias, & Friedlander,

1999) ineffective parent-child communication (Reid and Crisafulli, 1990; & Elias et al., 1987; & Elias et al., 1999), family dysfunction (Patterson, 1993), inadequate support systems, single parent households and poverty (Mellinger, 1989).

#### Definition of Terms

**Low-income** - this term was used to describe people or families whose annual incomes meet or fall below the Poverty Income Guidelines published annually by the U. S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) as mandated under 652 (a) (b) of Public law 99-425 of the Human Services Reauthorization Act (HHS ACYF-IM-87-13).

**Economically Disadvantaged** - this term was used to describe people or families whose annual incomes meet or fall below the Poverty Income Guidelines published annually by the U. S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) as mandated under 652 (a) (b) of Public law 99-425 of the Human Services Reauthorization Act (HHS ACYF-IM-87-13).

**Social Problem Solving** - referred to the ability to generate alternative solutions to interpersonal problematic situations, to evaluate the possible consequences of each alternative, and to choose the most effective solution to the problem.

**Incendiary Communication** - communication that was inflammatory in nature and tended to exacerbate a stressful situation.

**Affirming Communication** - communication that conveyed support and caring and exerted a calming influence.

**Social Support** - support provided from relatives, friends, neighbors and extended family to individuals or families.

**Social Competence** - the degree to which children get along with their peers, engage in pro-social behaviors and inhibit aversive, incompetent behavior (Dodge, Pettit, & Bates, 1994); the ability to achieve one's goals through the use of culturally acceptable strategies while simultaneously maintaining positive relationships with significant others (Rubin, 1998); the child's social goals and the means by which the child achieves them (Greenspan & Wieder, 1998; Rubin and Rose-Krasnor, 1992).

### Summary

This chapter described parent involvement, a pilot program, the intervention program, Best Families, the purpose of the study, research questions, significance of the study, and a definition of terms.

## Chapter 2

### Review of Literature

This chapter provides a review of the literature and is divided into five sections: 1) child-rearing styles, 2) the effect of parenting on child behavior, 3) review of child development, 4) parenting education programs, 5) the intervention, Best Families, and 6) a summary of the chapter.

### Child-Rearing Style

“Parents build the groundwork for a child’s positive feelings about himself/herself and set the stage to develop a child’s capacities for effective interaction with the world of people and things” (Pickarts & Fargo, 1971). “More parents fail through a trivial conception of their task rather than through setting goals that are too high. If we really believed that the training of children was the most important work of the world, we would undertake to fit ourselves for it” (Birney, 1914).

Economically disadvantaged parents tend to rely on parenting styles classified as Authoritarian (Baumrind, 1989), or Power Assertion or Telling Without an Explanation (Shure, 1998). This authoritarian child-rearing style was most likely used by their parents. They believe that this style of parenting is appropriate in their environment; however, this style has been associated with negative child outcomes producing children who are discontented, distrustful, withdrawn, many times violent, and who suffer from low self-esteem (Baumrind, 1991, & Shure 1994).

## Baumrind

Baumrind (1971) identified three types of parenting style, authoritarian, authoritative, and permissive. Authoritarian parents value obedience as a virtue and favor punitive, forceful measures to curb self-will at points at which a child's actions or beliefs conflict with their standards of acceptable conduct. These parents attempt to inculcate such conventional values as work, respect for authority, and preservation of order and traditional structure. They do not encourage verbal give and take, but rather believe that a child should accept a parent's word for what is right (Baumrind, 1989). Authoritative parents attempt to direct their children's activities in a rational, issue-oriented manner. They encourage verbal give and take and share with their children the reasoning behind their policies. They value both expressive and instrumental attributes, both autonomous self-will and disciplined conformity. Therefore, they exert firm control at points of parent-child divergence but do not hem their children in with restrictions. Permissive parents are less controlling than they are warm and autonomy granting. Permissive parents attempt to behave in a nonpunitive, accepting, and affirming manner toward their children's impulses, desires and actions (Baumrind, 1989).

## Shure

Shure (1999) identified five childrearing styles ranging from Power Assertion to Problem Solving (Shure, 1998).

The first style, Power Assertion, is identified by the use of negative communication strategies, such as threats, commands, demands, time-out, belittling,

name-calling, and spanking, etc. that enables parents to exert control over their children's behavior (Shure, 1995). This style is similar to Baumrind's Authoritarian parenting style (1971) and Patterson's coercive parenting style (Patterson, 1976).

The second style, Positive Alternatives-No explanations, tells a child what and what not to do without an explanation. For example: "Share your toys." "Ask your brother for what you want." "Wait 'till I'm finished." "Toys belong in your bedroom" (Shure, 1995). This style is a telling without an explanation and is more consistent with an Authoritarian parenting style.

The third style, Simple Explanation, uses simple explanations with moral overtones to tell the child what and what not to do. For example: "We don't hit our friends." "Was that the nice thing to do?" "Children must learn to share."

The fourth style, Induction/Reasoning/Explanation (including feelings), offers suggestions with explanations that include feelings. The parent continues to tell the child what and what not to do with explanations (Shure, 1995). For example: "If you hit, you might lose a friend (get hurt)." "You won't have any friends if you grab toys," "You're making me angry ..." "Your brother feels angry when you ...."

The fifth and ultimate style, Problem Solving, denotes a significant change in childrearing style by having the parent guide the child to think of feelings, solutions, and consequences to problem situations rather than telling the child what and what not to do. Dialoguing with the child by asking questions such as: What happened? What's the problem? How do you think he/she felt when? What happened next? How did that make you feel? Can you think of something different to do?

The Level Five - Problem solving child-rearing style was preferred because it

had benefits for the child, the parent, and society. Parents taught children to decide for themselves what they may and may not do, parents and children were taught to generate alternatives and evaluate consequences, parent-child interactions were positive, and family members were treated with respect. This style permitted the child some measure of control over his/her decisions and actions. Parents were expected to begin at a Level One or Level Two Child-Rearing Style (Baumrind, 1989) and move along the Child-Rearing Style continuum to a Level Five Child-Rearing Style.

Baumrind (1967, 1971, 1989, 1991, & 1993) did not tell us how to develop an Authoritative Style; her research did not include the development of a parenting education program. Shure, (1995), developed a workbook for parents to use with their children. This study incorporated those social problem solving components in the parenting education program.

### The Effect of Parenting on Child Behavior

An important goal of all families is to help prepare their children to participate successfully as citizens of the wider society. The relationship between parenting style and child outcomes has been identified in several studies (Baumrind, 1967, 1971, 1989, & 1991; Patterson, 1976, & Lazerele & Patterson, 1994). Many parental attributes affect the influence of particular parenting practices on child development and behavior (Darling, 1993).

Early childhood intervention programs for educationally at-risk poor children potentially provide a secure and supportive environment to enhance young children's emerging abilities and skills needed for future success in life (Greenfield,

Wasserstein, Gold, & Jorden, 1997). These programs frequently use a family centered approach that addresses issues concerning the total ecology of a child's development. Many children served by early intervention programs grow up in a social context that can be very stressful due to associated issues of poverty, the lack of health care and family stress.

Social problem solving skills are a significant factor in attaining social competence, which has been related to successful long-term outcomes of emotional adjustment and education. Because of the potentially long-term damaging impact of disturbed relationships, researchers have attempted to identify early indicators and mediators of social difficulties (Shure & Spivack, 1979; Shure, 1985, 1992, 1994, 1995; Dodge, 1986; Elias, M. J., Ubriaco, M., & Gray, J. 1985; Elias, M. J., Beier, J. J., & Gara, M. 1989; Elias, Tobias, & Friedlander, 1999; Goleman, 1995).

Bronfenbrenner (1979, 1986; Bronfenbrenner & Ceci, 1994) provided many insights from a social, ecological perspective that describe the micro and macro social systems in which children and families are embedded. He identified the impact of the total environment on the individual. Bronfenbrenner (1990) further identified the social forces that affect child development, which included the home, school and community.

Children in the Head Start population are at higher risk of academic failure because the risk factors of low-income, low education, teenage pregnancy, high levels of stress and ineffective parenting, are present at higher than average rates in these socially deprived families (McLoyd, 1990). Studies indicate that early academic difficulties, such as reading deficits and cognitive language delays, are associated with

poor social problem solving skills (Asarnov and Callan, 1985; Richard and Dodge, 1982; Rubin and Krasnor, 1986). There appears to be no empirical research on Head Start's efforts to promote parenting skills and to strengthen mutual support parent networks; whether Head Start programs can strengthen parent and child social skills is yet unknown (Webster-Stratton, 1998). The Best Families program addressed four child-rearing components: social problem solving skills, verbalization of emotions, parent-child communication, and social support.

### Review of Child Development

The preschool period is of special interest because it is a time when children begin to expand their social interactions beyond their primary caregivers to take on the developmental task of building relationships with their peers (Howes, 1988; Greenfield, Wasserstein, Gold, and Jorden, 1997). Young children who have difficulty mastering social skills are at increased risk for poor long-term educational and psychological outcomes (Parker and Asher, 1987; Rubin, Hymel, and Mills, 1989). Such tasks may be especially difficult for the increasing number of children exposed to poverty (Greenfield, et al., 1997).

Four year olds may best be described as energetic and imaginative. This imagination may become greater than life at times and be confused with reality in the four year olds' imaginative or "make believe" play (Webster-Stratton, 1992). Four year olds are able to understand such concepts as same-different, and-or, if-then, big-small, why-because, etc. which is the language of social problem solving. They also understand the order of daily routines and are able to predict what comes next and

identify before and after events such as: breakfast comes before lunch comes, you must peel a banana before eating it, etc. (Shure, 1994). These abilities promote the idea that children, as young as four years old, can develop the capacity to predict consequences for their behavior. Four year olds are able to ask who, what, when, why, and where questions; they are also able to answer these same questions. This permits the parent to assist the child to understand how events are connected. Four year olds' will, however, sometimes lie to protect themselves or their friends; although they do not understand the concept of lying. The four year old is able to follow simple directions, to comply with simple requests, and to understand and obey rules (Greenspan, 1995). Four year olds understand the concept of sharing and taking turns with other children. This concept of fairness is very important in the development of skills in social problem solving. Four year olds are able to understand and to identify feelings in themselves and others. Many times these children will comfort another child who is in distress. These children are able to develop appropriate verbalization of feelings and respond with empathy to others (Greenspan, 1998). Four year olds speak in fairly complex sentences and ask a lot of questions. These children also enjoy playing games, although many times they will change the rules. The Best Families program consisted of several games that introduced fun in the learning experience which was shared and enjoyed by both parent and child.

### Parenting Education Programs

Increasingly many government agencies and schools are using parenting education programs to involve parents in their children's lives. However, little is

known about parents' satisfaction with these parenting education programs, or about pragmatic, attitudinal, or other barriers that might interfere with adoption of more effective parenting practices. Frequently, commercially available parent education programs, such as Systematic Training for Effective Parenting (Dinkmeyer, D., Sr., McKay, Dinkmeyer, D., Jr., and Dinkmeyer, D. (1997), are used as the basis for these parenting programs. This approach may violate the basic tenets underlying the philosophy of "partnering with parents" (Dunst and Paget, 1991). Commercially available parent education programs generally are written for white, middle class parents. The assumptions, attitudes, techniques, and instructional approaches may not be reflective of or sensitive to the range of cultural diversity represented in the American population (Wood and Baker, 1999). Social class is another variable that is related to child rearing practices such that substantive differences are noted between parents at opposite ends of the economic and educational continua (Hoff-Ginsberg and Tardiff, 1995; Kohn, 1990). The needs of the parents on the lower end of the economic and educational continua are different.

One of the first initiatives to advance parenting education in the United States was provided by Rudolph Dreikurs. In the early 1960's, Dreikurs promoted neighborhood discussion groups (Dreikurs & Soltz, 1991). Some of the topics presented for discussion included understanding child behavior and effective communication with your child. These efforts became prototypes for some parenting education programs developed at a later date, for example, Systematic Training for Effective Parenting (Dinkmeyer and McKay, 1989).

## Affective Programs

### Systematic Training for Effective Parenting.

Systematic Training for Effective Parenting (STEP) (Dinkmeyer, D., Sr., McKay, Dinkmeyer, D., Jr., and Dinkmeyer, D. (1997) employs a nine week program that focuses on individual values, attitudes, and perceptions of life that influence the quality of the parent-child relationship. The parent-child relationship is influenced by the child-rearing procedures the parents use and by the child's position in the family. STEP addresses such issues as understanding your child's behavior, communicating your feelings to your child, encouraging one's child rather than using rewards and punishment, establishing family conferences, etc. STEP encourages the parent-child relationship and reducing conflict within the family; the focus is on the affective climate rather than social problem solving. Social problem solving, verbalization of emotions, and social support are components not addressed in this program, neither are strategies that build communication skills. This program may be used with individuals or with a group. Although this program is popular throughout the United States, empirical research on this program appears to be limited to school programs which focus on the development of understanding of self and others which may include the parent as teachers' helpers (Dinkmeyer & McKay, 1986). Dinkmeyer (1986) proposed that parent involvement in such a school program could be advantageous because of the critical nature of the parent-child relationship. This program is based on Adlerian theory, which is more consistent with the beliefs of higher education status parents (Wood and Baker, 1999).

## Behavioristic Programs

### Between Parent and Child

The Between Parent and Child (Ginot, 1965) program provides concepts and ideas for child-rearing and gives examples of right and wrong methods of using the suggested parenting techniques. This program provides a guide for parents to develop techniques and methods for handling their children and proposes that the parent has the sole responsibility to implement the experiential concepts and ideas within their own families. This program uses a more directive approach to tell parents what and what not to do with their children rather than being challenged to think for themselves and teaching their children to think for themselves, which is the social problem style of parenting. The focus of this program is on teaching parent strategies for child management rather than teaching strategies to build skills and competence in social problem solving, verbalization of emotions, parent-child communication and social support. The components of the Best Families program were not addressed by Ginot's program.

### Parenting the Strong Willed Child

Parenting the Strong Willed Child (Forehand & Long, 1996) outlines a 5 week behavioristic program for shaping the behavior of one's child. The program suggests specific techniques for managing one's child by attending, rewarding appropriate behaviors, ignoring unwanted behaviors, giving directions and using time out. This program promotes a 'how to' approach with "do's" and "don'ts" for each concept. This program uses a prescriptive approach rather than teaching parents a general problem solving approach. This behavioristic approach doesn't promote self-

regulation but external control. Empirical research relating to this program appeared to be limited. This behavioristic approach was counter to a social problem solving approach because its focus was on behavior management rather than on the development of skills and social competence. The components of the Best Families program of social problem solving, verbalization of emotions, parent-child communication, and social support were missing in the Parenting The Strong Willed Child program.

#### The New Dare To Discipline

The New Dare to Discipline (Dobson, 1992) approach presents a more direct method of parenting which Dobson terms “common sense” in which the parent is fully in charge. The New Dare to Discipline program addresses such issues as developing respect for parents through discipline, communicating with your children particularly after a disciplinary event, controlling your child without nagging, not saturating your child with materialism, and establishing a balance between love and discipline. This parenting program espoused particular values. Give and take relationships and discussion of issues between parent and child were not encouraged. The parenting style suggested by this program is "Authoritarian" (Baumrind, 1967) or "Power Assertive", "Telling Without an Explanation" (Shure, 1998), which is already the style of many economically disadvantaged parents. These styles of child-rearing are associated with negative child outcomes, such as: anti-social behavior, coercive relationships, school failure, and inadequate social problem solving skills. (Patterson, 1976; & Lazerele & Patterson, 1994). Children reared in homes where an authoritarian or power assertive parenting style is used are more likely to be

distrustful, withdrawn, and discontented (Baumrind, 1971). Empirical research relating to this parenting program was limited. The focus of this parent program appeared to be parental control, which was the opposite of a problem solving style of parenting. The components of the Best Families program - social problem solving, verbalization of emotions, parent-child communication, and social support - were not addressed in the New Dare to Discipline program.

#### Assertive Discipline for Parents

Assertive Discipline for Parents (Canter and Canter, 1993) suggested that the parent is the “boss”. Program concepts include communicating assertively, backing up your words with actions, and laying down the law. The program presented a systematic method for controlling your children. The focus of this program is parental control and promotes an authoritarian or power assertion parenting style, not one that was socially responsible or independent and autonomous. Empirical data relating to this parenting education program were limited. The components of the Best Families program - social problem solving, verbalization of emotions, parent-child communication, and social support – were not addressed in the Assertive Discipline for Parents program.

The above referenced parent education programs promoted the concept that the parent should do the thinking, telling and deciding of what behavior is or is not appropriate for the child. The quality of the parent-child interaction appeared to be a non-negotiable situation, based solely on the discretion of the parent with little or no ‘give and take’. Empirical research concerning these aforementioned programs is limited. Many parenting programs are prescriptive in nature and provide very specific

techniques and strategies for parents to follow in parenting their child. Many of these programs are currently popular and encourage authoritarian parenting styles that tell a child what and what not to do. Some styles allow for give and take in the parent-child relationship, yet do not teach a child how to think for himself.

### Problem Solving Programs

#### Raising A Thinking Child

In contrast to the behavioristic approach to parenting education, The Raising a Thinking Child (RTC) (Shure, 1994, 1995) program was designed for use by parents with their four to seven year old children. A major difference in this program versus the behavioristic programs was that the child becomes a partner with the parent and is able to participate in a developmentally appropriate manner in solving problems.

Some examples of parent/child problems to be solved include: (a) child demands that his/her needs be met immediately, (b) child whines, (c) child interrupts you while you are on the phone. Parent responds, “Can you find something else to do while I am on the phone?” This social problem solving approach provided an opportunity for a parent and child to practice solving these everyday types of problems. The RTC offers special dialogues, games, activities, and communication techniques for teaching one’s child how to problem solve. The RTC workbook was designed for parents to employ with their children using the lessons and activities outlined in the workbook. Empirical research relating to the use of Shure’s problem solving concepts with parents was limited to a few studies (Caravello, 1992; Bumgardner, 1996; and Aberson, 1996). The RTC program primarily addressed the problems of

four to seven year olds. Conversely, the Best Families program taught parents how to solve problems and how to teach their children the skills to problem solve in a developmentally appropriate manner. The remaining components of the Best Families program of verbalization of emotions, parent-child communication, and social support were not addressed in the RTC program.

### Emotionally Intelligent Parenting

Emotionally Intelligent Parenting (Elias, Tobias, and Friedlander, 1999) teaches parents how to communicate with their children on a deeper, more gratifying level and how to help their children develop interpersonal communication skills. Elias et al., (1999) examined the role of emotional regulation in family conflict and daily hassles and suggested techniques to be used in the attainment of household peace and harmony. The approach was based on five principles of emotional regulation which serve as goals for parents and children. The five principles of emotional regulation of an awareness of one's own and the feelings of others, showing empathy and understanding others' points of view, regulating and coping in a positive fashion with emotional and behavioral impulses, being positive goal and plan oriented, and using positive social skills in handling relationships are important for future success in life. Parents need emotional self-regulation to guide their children. The approach was developed for use by parents as a self-help book or for professionals with higher levels of formal education to use for parenting education programs. Empirical research on Emotionally Intelligent Parenting was limited, but empirical research using the concepts outlined in Emotionally Intelligent Parenting

was conducted in school settings (Elias, Ubriaco, & Gray, 1985; Elias, Gara, Rothbaum, Reese, & Ubriaco, 1987; Elias, Beier, & Gara, 989; & Elias & Allen, 1991). Elias, et al., (1985) conducted a study that consisted of four working class families who participated in a family interaction assessment. These families participated in the assessment while they were monitored on video and their non-verbal reactions to child responses were recorded. This observation took about one-half hour and was followed by having the parents complete a demographic questionnaire and several parenting self-report measures. Conversely the Best Families program was conducted during a four week period, with two hour classes each week. Additionally the components of problem solving and verbalization of emotions were partially addressed in the Emotionally Intelligent Parenting (Elias, et al., 1987) program.

Table 1 illustrates the differences in the various components of the parenting programs reviewed and the components of the Best Families program.

Table 1: Comparison of Parent Education Programs With Best Families Components

Parent Education Programs	Affect	Behavior Management	Social Problem Solving	Verbalization of Emotions	Parent-Child Communication	Social Support
STEP	X				X	
Between Parent and Child		X				
Parenting the Strong Willed Child		X				
The New Dare To Discipline		X				
Assertive Discipline for Parents		X				
Raising A Thinking Child			X			
Emotionally Intelligent Parenting			X	X		
Best Families			X	X	X	X

Most parenting education programs have not been evaluated formally as noted above. Research on some parent education program concepts have been researched using school populations and most of these parent education programs have been designed for white middle-class, well educated parents. Different parents are reached by different approaches to the same problems in childrearing and are influenced by different points of view (Weeks, 1914; Halpern, 1990; & Bronfenbrenner, 1990).

### Best Families Intervention

The Best Families program was developed to address the everyday problems of low-income parents who frequently have limited formal education. The goal of the Best Families program was to provide a supportive structured home environment that optimized child development and improved parent-child communication.

The researcher received a Bachelor of Arts degree from Delaware State University and a Master of Counseling degree from the University of Delaware. She was employed as a Drug and Alcohol Counselor by Turnabout Counseling Center for 2 years. She was employed by the State of Delaware for a period of 22 years where she spent 10 years working as a Counselor in the Division of Youth Rehabilitation Services, 12 years as a Psychiatric Social Worker III and Supervisor for the Division of Child Mental Health. While employed by the Division of Child Mental Health, four years were spent in supervision and training of personnel and compiling social and family histories and making recommendations to the Family Court of Delaware as to case disposition; 8 years were spent as a Mental Health Consultant and Trainer for the Community Consultation Program with primary responsibilities for the development, management, consultation and training of the Head Start Mental Health Programs for 4 Head Start agencies. She has been self-employed as a Consultant and Trainer with 3 Head Start agencies since 1999. She has extensive on-site training by the Philadelphia Child Guidance Clinic in the Family Focus program.

Best Families program was developed with four components that consisted of social problem solving, verbal expression of emotions, affirming communication, and social support. The Best Families program provided adults and children with a positive and respectful approach for communicating with others and resolving conflicts. The program was based on well established behavioral-social learning principles that described how behaviors are learned and how they can be changed (Bandura, 1986; Vygotsky, 1978). The basis of this experiential approach was the simple idea that people change as a result of their daily interactions with others (Berk

& Winsler, 1995). The Best Families program promoted a social problem solving style of child rearing that consisted of teaching the participants the social problem solving strategies and skills needed to assist their children in developing thinking skills and guiding them to use internal processes when making decisions and thus enhance their future.

One way parents can affect the behavior of their children is to tell them what to do, then give praise when they comply and use discipline when they do not (Ginot, 1965; Dobson, 1992; & Canter & Canter, 1993). Another way is to help children think about how their actions affect others and then to guide them toward deciding for themselves what and what not to do (Shure, 1994, Elias, Tobias & Friendlander, 1999, & Goleman, 1995). The first approach focuses directly on the behavior itself; the second focuses on the process of a child's thinking. When a child experiences interpersonal problems, the approach that the parents take can make a difference in the way a child solves the problem. The Best Families program was built around teaching parents social problem solving and communication skills based on approaches similar to Elias, et al., (1999), Shure (1994), & Goleman (1995).

### Social Problem Solving

Research has shown that teaching children to problem solve greatly enhances their ability to succeed in life (Goleman, 1995). Effective social problem solving strategies assist individuals in generating options to address problem behaviors, rather than reacting to problems in an impulsive and emotional manner (Priester & Clum, 1993; Goleman, 1995). For people of all ages, social problem solving skills are

important to deal effectively with others.

Social problem solving consisted of the language of social problem solving, identifying your own and others emotions, generating alternatives, and evaluating consequences.

Durlak and Wells Meta Analysis (1997) of prevention programs for children indicated that problem-solving programs were quite successful with children aged two to seven years in an academic environment. Although various prevention programs were evaluated, the social problem solving programs, particularly the I Can Problem Solve program (Shure, 1992), were the most effective with the children in this age group.

Webster-Stratton (1993) found that deficits in social problem solving skills were related to poor adjustment in elementary school children aged 6 to 8 years. Dubow & Tisak (1989) found that social problem solving skills were directly related to parent ratings of their third through fifth grade child's behavioral adjustment within their homes and teacher's ratings of third through fifth grade students' behavioral adjustment, social problem solving skills, in school and to grade point averages.

Individuals who can think in a problem solving fashion are believed to be more successful and to be adjusted better socially than those who have not learned to think in this way (Goleman, 1995, Shure, 1994). The development of social problem solving skills creates ongoing opportunities for mutually satisfying experiences with children, peers and other adults. Such skills are personal resources rather than resources that must be provided by others; therefore it was likely that parents, as well as children, would use these skills to obtain successful outcomes across situations.

Most interpersonal problem-solving programs have been influenced by Spivack & Shure's (1974) conceptual framework that views social problem solving skills as an important part of adjustment. Although programs vary in which specific skills are targeted, these programs generally attempt to teach children how to use cognitively based skills. These cognitive skills assist them to identify interpersonal problems and to develop effective means for resolving such difficulties (Durlak and Wells, 1997).

The Best Families program consisted of a social problem solving child-rearing style which promoted positive interactions between family members, respect for individual differences and ideas, promoted harmony within the family, and was a win-win approach to child rearing. This type of child-rearing style allowed for parent-child relationships to have 'give and take' as well as the development of critical thinking skills in both the parent and the child in various situations.

Parents were taught to recognize and to understand their own and others emotions through the use of self report inventories, discussion of problematic situations and their actions or reactions to such situations. The program explored how the situation was handled, how they felt about how they handled the situation and what they could do differently next time. Parents were taught strategies for teaching these concepts to their children.

The goal of the Best Families program was to reinforce parents' efforts to foster interpersonal communication and social problem solving within their families, particularly with their children. This program also provided parents with practical ways to teach these necessary skills to their children.

### Verbal Regulation of Emotions

Parents need to identify and to verbalize their emotions and communicate them to others in a manner that does not exacerbate situations (Elias, Tobias, & Friedlander, 1999). Parents need to verbalize their emotions in an appropriate manner to be able to regulate, to guide, and to teach their children how to verbalize and manage their emotions. Emotionally expressive parents, by modeling various emotions, allow their child the freedom to observe and encode information about emotional expressions and situations. Parents who freely express moderate levels of emotion give children specific information about the nature of happiness, sadness, anger, and fear, including their expressions (Denham, Zoller, & Couchoud, 1994). Thus understanding emotion may be a particularly powerful tool to manage feelings and to deal with interpersonal conflict (Kopp, 1989).

Comprehension of emotional expressions and situations and the ability to converse about the causes of emotional distress assist individuals to communicate their own and predict others' feelings and behaviors. (Denham, et al., 1994). The ability and effort to inhibit a behavior or emotional response or to perform a modulated or different response is required in many developmental processes, such as self-regulation, expression of emotions, and socialization (Kochanska, 1993). Parents were taught to be aware of and to understand their own and others emotions through the use of self report inventories, discussion of problematic situations and their actions or reactions to such situations. The program explored how the situation was handled, how they felt about how they handled the situation and what they could do differently the next time. The Best Families program included material on parent and

children's emotional expression that was addressed in the second component.

### Affirming Communication

Research indicates that high levels of negative emotion have disorganizing and debilitating effects on individual and interpersonal functioning (Garner, Jones, & Miller, 1994) and that children's pro-social behavior must be nurtured within the family (Grusec, 1991, & Garner, et al., 1994). Parents who frequently use yelling and threats at home and in public view as a means to control their children's behavior (Solomon & Serres, 1999) erode the child's self-esteem and confidence. A large majority of parents reported that they used yelling, either alone or in conjunction with hitting, as a means to control their children during the pre-intervention interview prior to the beginning of the Best Families program. .

The parent-child relationship is the primary developmental context in which early cognitive, social, and behavioral development occurs. Communication is a significant factor in determining the quality of the parent-child relationship, which may be more or less positive for parent and child depending on the skills of the adult across various parenting tasks (Bornstein, 1995). Parent-child communication appears to be significantly related to a child's behavior and the degree of social competence the child achieves. Appropriate and effective parent-child communication was addressed in the affirming communication component of the Best Families program.

Each conversation you have provides an opportunity to promote goals, to increase learning and to develop relationships (Harkins, 1999). According to Harkins

(1999) clear communication that moves toward desired results is not innate but can be developed. Assisting parents to develop effective communication strategies with their children was the focus of the affirming communication component of the Best Families program.

### Social Support

Social support studies relating to children have emphasized instrumental mechanisms such as opportunities to learn and practice interpersonal skills ( Cochran and Riley, 1990), whereas studies involving adult social support have stressed psychological mechanisms such as appraisal of support from network members and feelings of acceptance (Sarason, Sarason and Pierce, 1992) as the critical predictors of well-being. Individual's perceptions regarding both the availability and satisfaction of social networks, the feeling that one is acceptable to others, and successful coping strategies are important factors in social support. Caregiver social support and other social support systems by significant others greatly influences the parent-child relationship (Bost, Vaughan, Washington, Cielinski, and Bradbard, 1998).

Researchers have documented the relationship between maternal social supports and aspects of parent-child interactions (Cox & Paley, 1997) and peer competence (Melson, Ladd, and Hsu, 1993). In their study of Head Start children, Bost, et al. (1998) found a strong correlation between children's social competence and their ongoing relationships within the family, as well as the larger social support and relationships in which they are embedded. Social support systems influence the parent-child relationship as well as providing the opportunity to develop social

problem solving skills (Bost et. al., 1998) and to verbalize emotions.

The Best Families parent education program provided participants with encouragement, support, and opportunities for role-playing. Pertinent information for building effective and appropriate support systems and for accessing available resources within the community was provided. A “buddy system” was instituted during the first session of the Best Families program to encourage parents to use informal social support networks. These networks or groups were used as models to teach participants how to develop the skills for building social support systems that would encourage attendance at the training on a regular basis. The Best Families program provided pertinent information for the development of social support through networking and linkage. These strategies were addressed in the Social Support component of the program.

Self-assessment, role-playing, and simulations of common parent-child conflicts were used to assist participants in the development of the skills and strategies presented in the training. Parents were asked to think of their frequent parent-child conflicts and to describe and discuss these situations with the group. Parents were taught strategies to assist them to teach these problem solving and communication skills to their children. It was proposed that such a program assisted parents to develop and to integrate the skills necessary for effective parenting as well as the successful negotiation of life in today’s world. This program added problem solving and affirming communication skills as experiential components for parents that were absent in the pilot study in 1998. The Best Families program was intended to add greater meaning and comprehension to parents’ use of social problem solving

strategies, verbal expression of emotions, affirming communication, and social supports to enhance their own lives as well as their child-rearing practices.

### Summary

The review of the literature presented a short history of parenting, parenting styles, and various parenting education programs. The research supported the necessity of providing a parenting education program developed especially for economically disadvantaged parents. This need was addressed through the development of the Best Families program.

## Chapter 3

### Methodology

This chapter will discuss 1) the research design, 2) the sampling frame, 3) the participants, 4) the intervention, the Best Families parenting education program, 5) the instruments, 6) the procedure, 7) the data analyses, and 8) a chapter summary.

### Research Design

This study utilized a pre-post intervention structured interview to assess the effects of the Best Families program. Prior to the parenting education intervention, each participant was administered a number of measures during a personal interview. These measures included an assessment of the parent's child-rearing style using the Child-Rearing Style Interview, (Shure, 1998); a brief biographical survey; a depression inventory using the Beck Depression Inventory (Beck, 1972); the Achenbach Child Behavior Checklist (Achenbach & Edelbrock, 1983) which is a parent's rating of the child's behavior problems at home; and an index of affirming communication using the Family Problem Style Communication Index (McCubbin, McCubbin, & Thompson, 1988). In addition, Head Start teachers completed a checklist of children's behavior problems in school using the Achenbach Teacher Report Form (Achenbach & Edelbrock, 1986). The parenting education program, Best Families, was delivered in four sessions, one 2-hour session per week.

During the post-intervention personal interview with each participant, each of the measures assessed during the pre-treatment phase (with the exception of the Beck

Depression Inventory) was re-administered. These measures included the parent's child-rearing style, using the Child-Rearing Style Interview, (Shure, 1992), the Child Behavior Checklist, (Achenbach & Edelbrock, 1983), and an index of affirming communication using the Family Problem Style Communication Index (McCubbin, McCubbin, & Thompson, 1988). Participants also rated their level of satisfaction with their experience in the Best Families program using a Parent Satisfaction Questionnaire. In addition, the Head Start teachers completed the Achenbach checklist of behavior problems in school using the Teacher Report Form, (Achenbach & Edelbrock, 1986).

### Sampling Frame

Parents who had children enrolled in federally-funded Head Start programs in a mid-Atlantic state were invited to participate in the Best Families program. Eligibility criteria for the program included the child's age (4-5 years) and a household income at or below federal poverty income guidelines (HHS, 2001).

Personal contact was made with the Head Start Executive Director to describe the Best Families program and to seek her endorsement. A follow up letter was sent the Executive Director (See Appendix A). Following this personal contact and, subsequently, the Executive Director's endorsement; the Executive Director approved recruitment of parents whose children would be enrolled during the 2001 Head Start summer program. Moreover, the Executive Director assigned family service workers from three of the Head Start Centers to assist in data collection for this study.

The Head Start Centers sent a letter to the parents of all of the children eligible to enroll in the 2001 Head Start summer program inviting them to participate in the parenting education program, Best Families. An overall description of the Best Families program was provided for Head Start parents by the researcher during a monthly parent meeting in the spring of 2001. At this meeting, parents were invited to participate in the parenting education program. Interested parents pre-registered for the Best Families program at that time. A follow up-letter and other program information were sent to pre-registered parents reminding them of the starting date of the program. Moreover, a packet that included a letter, a registration form, a human subjects' consent form, and a stamped self-addressed envelope was sent to encourage all other eligible parents who had not registered for the program to do so. The letter requested that the parent complete the registration and consent forms and return them to the researcher in the stamped addressed envelope (see Appendix B).

Prior to the beginning of the program, the researcher presented an outline of the Best Families program to the Head Start Center teaching staff during pre-service training. This familiarized the staff with the Best Families program, and staff members were then able to answer parents' questions about the program.

### Participants

The participants in this study were volunteer parents whose children were enrolled in a Head Start program in a mid-Atlantic state during the summer of 2001. All participants shared similar socio-economic status. All parents reported that they never had participated in parent education training with a problem solving focus. All

parents were English speaking and none were considered clinically depressed according to the screening criteria. (Beck Depression Inventory, Beck, 1972). All parents agreed to complete a pre-post intervention interview and to attend at least three of the four sessions of the Best Families program.

In summer 2001, the three participating Head Start Centers served 79 English-speaking families who composed the pool of eligible participants for this study. Of the 53 parents who pre-registered for this study, 15 parents did not attend the scheduled initial interview and nine parents dropped out of the study during or shortly after the initial interviews in the spring of 2001. Reasons given for these dropouts included new jobs, scheduling conflicts, moves and family crises (e.g., fire, loss of housing, legal problems, etc).

Thirty volunteer parents (28 mothers and 2 fathers) completed the initial interview and completed the Best Families program. Of the individuals participating in the study, 19 had boys and 11 had girls enrolled in Head Start summer programs. The mean age of these children was four years and four months. Nine of the parenting program participants were married, four were separated, one was divorced and 16 were single. Twenty of the participants were Americans of African descent, seven were Hispanic Americans, and three were Caucasian. None of the participants in this study scored above 25 on the Beck Depression Inventory (Beck, 1972), which was the cut-off score established by Beck indicative of clinical depression. Fourteen of the 30 parents reported that they “frequently” yelled, hit, or spanked their child.

## Intervention

The Best Families program, developed by this researcher, was the parenting education intervention used in this study. Parenting skill deficits have been identified as an important risk factor in the development and maintenance of children's behavior problems. The Best Families program presented a social problem solving approach to child-rearing, verbal regulation of emotion, positive affirming parent-child communication, and the development and maintenance of social support systems. This social problem solving framework extended the parenting education programs of Shure (1994) and Elias, Tobias, and Friedlander (1999) and focused on the process of a child's thinking. Parents who use a problem-solving approach to child rearing are able to assist their children to develop social problem solving skills and to develop emotional self-regulation.

The Best Families program consisted of four sessions: one 2-hour meeting a week for four weeks. These classes were conducted by this researcher who had extensive experience working in Head Start programs with teachers, parents, and children. These interactive sessions were designed to encourage parents to collaborate with each other, to encourage problem solving, and to empower parents through the support provided by the group and the program's emphasis on self-regulation and self-management. To help ensure that the training was relevant, participants were encouraged to share their experiences when they had tried to implement the skills that had been introduced and practiced in the previous session. Classroom discussions encouraged self-assessment. The Best Families program was presented three times, once in each of the participating Head Start Centers. In order

to ensure the consistency of this intervention across Head Start Centers, the instructor followed the detailed training manual for each session.

The knowledge, strategies, and skills necessary for a child rearing problem-solving style were incorporated in the four sessions of the Best Families program. The Best Families program consisted of four modules, each module addressing an aspect of the essential knowledge, strategies, and skills of social problem solving. The topics addressed in the respective sessions included: 1) social problem solving strategies, 2) verbal expression of emotions, 3) affirming communication styles, and 4) the development and maintenance of effective social support systems. Each session included time for the participants to discuss the usefulness, challenges, limitations, and frustrations when they implemented at home the alternative problem solving and communication skills that they had learned in the program. Participants were encouraged to describe to each other the alternatives and solutions that they had used to resolve problematic situations with their families.

#### The Best Families Program

Module 1: Social Problem Solving Strategies. The first session introduced social problem solving strategies to the participants and asked the participants to identify a parent-child problem to be resolved during the program. The skills to be developed during this class session were the ability to develop the language of problem solving, to identify the problem, and to generate alternative approaches to solving the problem.

At the beginning of the program, the researcher completed her welcome message, introduced the Best Families program, and presented the goals of the program. Parents then were asked to introduce themselves to the group. The

researcher then introduced the topic for that module: social problem solving. An informal lecture on problem solving strategies was presented, allowing for participants' questions and comments. After the presentation, parents were requested to identify a recent problem that they had experienced with their child. Many problems identified by the parents were common to the group. The group chose one problem to role-play using various strategies. During the role-play, the group generated several alternative strategies that could be used to resolve the problem. Following the role-playing activity, parents chose an alternative strategy to try with their child during the following week.

Module 2: Verbal Regulation of Emotion. At the beginning of Session 2, parents eagerly described what strategies they had attempted to use with their children during the prior week and the relative effectiveness of their strategies. Following the same informal lecture format that had been adopted in Session 1, the researcher introduced the topic of verbal regulation of emotion. This lecture included alternative strategies that parents could use in stressful situations. The researcher asked parents to recall a particular situation, to identify the feelings associated with that situation, and to express how they responded. Role-playing vignettes were used frequently. For example, one parent described a particular problem that she had experienced with her child and the group agreed to role-play the situation. Recognition of situations that elicit affective responses and identification of emotional feelings and expressions are skills necessary for verbalizing emotions. The ability to converse about the antecedent conditions that give rise to emotions assist individuals to communicate

their own and to predict other people's feelings and behaviors (Denham, Zoeller & Couchoud, 1994).

Module 3: Positive Affirming Communication. At the beginning of Session 3, parents reported the strategies that they had implemented during the prior week with their child and the relative effectiveness of their strategies. Following the same informal lecture format that was used in previous sessions, the researcher introduced the topic of the development of positive affirming styles of parent-child communication. The skills to be developed were the ability to identify problems, to generate alternatives, and to evaluate the consequences. During this session, participants were encouraged to express their preferences to their child or a significant other in a positive way, rather than blaming. The researcher attempted to assist the parents in recognizing how a negative communication style affected their child's behavior and that other more positive, affirming communication strategies were available to obtain the desired response. During this session, a role-playing activity to model a negative communication behavior was conducted. "Blaming" accusations were directed towards one volunteer participant in an attempt to introduce how such blaming behaviors affect a person's response. The participants appeared uncomfortable while watching this demonstration. Through group discussion, it was obvious that participants processed their feelings and reactions and were able to identify similar negative communication behaviors that they had used with their child.

Module 4: Development and Maintenance of Social Support Systems. Session 4 began again with the participants sharing their experiences of attempting to implement positive, affirming communication. Parents reported the strategies that

they had implemented with their children during the prior week. Parents expressed a great deal of pride in the success they experienced with the implementation of the new positive communication strategies that they had learned. Following the same informal lecture format as the previous sessions, the researcher introduced the topic of the development and maintenance of social support systems. The skills introduced during the fourth session included an awareness and understanding of the importance of giving and providing social support. After the lecture, parents were asked to discuss ways in which they provided and received social support.

At the conclusion of the Best Families program, all participants scheduled their post-treatment interview with their assigned Head Start family service worker. These interviews were conducted within two weeks of the last session of the Best Families program at the participating Head Start Centers. Teachers also completed the post-intervention checklist of the children's problem behaviors using the Teacher Report Form (Achenbach & Edelbrock, 1986).

### Instruments

The following instruments were used in this study to determine whether the intervention, Best Families, affected a parent's child-rearing style. Prior to participation in the actual intervention, the following interviews and inventories were completed. Each parent completed a structured interview which included the following: a Biographical Questionnaire, the Beck Depression Inventory Self Assessment, (Beck, 1972), the Child-Rearing Style Interview, (Shure, 1998), the Child Behavior Checklist, (Achenbach & Edelbrock, 1983), the Family Problem

Solving Communication, (McCubbin, et al., 1988). In addition, the teachers completed a Teacher Report Form (Achenbach & Edelbrock, 1986), for each child.

Upon the completion of the four learning modules of the Best Families parent education program, parents were required to complete a follow-up interview. The following post interview instruments were again completed: 3) the Child-Rearing Style Interview, (Shure, 1998), 4) the Child Behavior Checklist, (Achenbach & Edelbrock, 1983), 5) the Family Problem Solving Communication, (McCubbin, et al., 1988). In addition teachers were required to complete a post Teacher Report Form (Achenbach & Edelbrock, 1986) on each student in the study and parents completed a Parent Satisfaction Questionnaire to assess the program.

A family service worker completed the structured personal interview with the parent one week before the beginning of the Best Families program. The post intervention personal interview was completed within two weeks of the completion of the Best Families program by the same interviewer. Self-administration of the program evaluation instruments required a specific reading level. Since reading levels of the participants were not known, the trained interviewers read the questions to the participants, showed the participant a response card for forced choice answers, and asked participants to respond by pointing to the selected response. This strategy standardized the administration of the instruments.

#### Biographical Questionnaire

A Biographical Questionnaire, developed for use in this study by the researcher, gathered basic demographic information, which was used to describe the

study participants (see Appendix A). The Biographical Questionnaire consisted of eleven items and was administered orally at the beginning of the pre-intervention personal interview. Demographic variables in the Biographical Questionnaire were: 1) Name of Head Start Center in which your child is enrolled, 2) Child's Name, 3) Child's Date of Birth, 4) Parent's Name, 5) Parent's Date of Birth, 6) Gender of parent, 7) Gender of child, 8) Racial/Ethnic Background, 9) Marital Status, 10) Formal Educational Level, 11) Living Arrangements, 12) Occupation, 13) Employment, 14) Religious Affiliation, and 15) previous participation in parenting education programs.

#### Beck Depression Inventory

The Beck Depression Inventory (BDI) (Beck, 1972) was used at the time of the pre-interview to screen parents for clinical depression. Rates of depression are high among poor mothers (Cernic and Acevedo, 1995) and evidence suggests that parental depression may be a major factor interfering with good parenting and a child's psychosocial adjustment (Greist, Wells and Forehand, 1979).

The BDI consisted of 21 groups of statements that assessed the intensity of depression. Each group of four statements is arranged in increasing severity about a particular symptom of depression and was scored on a four point Likert type scale.

An example of a group of statements is:

- 0 I do not feel sad
- 1 I feel sad
- 2 I am sad all the time and I can't snap out of it

3 I am so sad or unhappy that I can't stand it.

Participants were requested to point to the response that best described the way they were or had been feeling during the past few days.

A trained interviewer administered this instrument at the time of the pre-treatment structured interview. Possible scores range from 0 to 63 with a higher score indicating more severe depression. The cut-off depression score for the program was set at 25, a score which indicates clinical depression. The BDI has been shown to correlate significantly with clinician's ratings of depression (Metcalf and Goldman, 1965) and with objective behavioral measures of depression (Williams, Barlow, & Agras, 1972). None of the participants had a score of 25 or higher in this study.

### Child-Rearing Style Interview

The Child-Rearing Style Interview (Shure, 1998) was selected as one method for assessing parents' child-rearing style. The Child-Rearing Style Interview (Shure, 1998), which identifies five childrearing styles, was administered pre- and post-intervention in a personal interview. The five child-rearing styles identified by Shure (1998) include:

- 1) Power Assertion, which is based on threats, commands, demands, belittling, name-calling, and spanking – any negative communication.
- 2) Positive Alternatives, which is based on telling a child what to do in a positive fashion without an explanation such as: "Share your toys."
- 3) Simple Explanations with Moral Overtones, which is based on telling a child what to do and implying morality such as: "We don't hit our friends, was that a nice

- thing to do?"
- 4) Induction/ Reasoning/ Explanation (including feelings), which is based on telling a child what to do with a reasonable explanation such as: "You won't have any friends if you grab toys."
- 5) Problem Solving: I Can Problem Solve Dialoguing that asks, rather than tells, a child to identify the situation such as: "What happened? What's the problem?"

The Child-Rearing Style Interview is scored by considering three types of parent responses:

- 1) Parent responses are scored according to the Child Rearing Styles identified above.
- 2) "Why" questions.

A. Non-information seeking "why" questions:

The question "Why did you do that?" is usually a non-information seeking question. If the parent comes back with "her agenda" regardless of what the child says the response is scored a '1'. For example: Responses such as: "Why did you hit him!" should be scored a '1' on the Child-Rearing Style Interview.

B. Information seeking "Why" questions.

Some "why" questions are genuine information seeking questions which seek to obtain information from the child to use in further dialogue and are scored according to the follow-up response. For example: If the statements or questions following the "why" indicated that the parent listened and responded to what the child said, the "why" is scored a '5'.

3) Any parent statement irrelevant to the problem should not be coded.

The final score is the sum of the scores for the coded statements divided by the total number of coded statements.

The Child-Rearing Style Interview (Shure, 1998) was administered by Head Start family service workers who had been trained to administer the measures used in this study. This measure was administered before and after participation in the Best Families program during Spring 2001 and again within two weeks after the completion of the Best Families program. The Child-Rearing Style Interview consists of one problem-related question and was structured as follows:

Interviewer question: "Tell me of a problem you recently experienced with (child's name)?"

The parent then described a recent problem with the targeted child.

Interviewer question: "When your child did \_\_\_\_\_, what did you do?"

Parent responded: "I ..."

This dialogue continued and the interviewer recorded questions and responses until the interviewer and the participant reached the end of the identified problem situation. The dependent variable was the style identified by the rating derived from the coded statements.

#### Child Behavior Checklist

The Child Behavior Checklist (CBCL) (Achenbach and Edelbrock, 1983) was selected to measure parents' perceptions of their children's behavior problems. The instrument measures the frequency of a child's externalizing (aggressive) behavior

and internalizing (withdrawn) behavior. In this study the CBCL was administered to the parents orally by the trained interviewer, as recommended by Achenbach and Edelbrock (1983, pg.114) when there is some doubt about a parent's reading level.

Parents rated their children on 118 Behavior Problem items. These 118 Behavior Problem items measure a parent's perception of the child's behavior and are scored using a 3-point, Likert-type scale with response alternatives of: Not true = 0; Sometimes true = 1; and Very true = 2. A sample CBCL Behavior Problem item is: Can't sit still, restless, or hyperactive.

The 118 CBCL Behavior Problem items were administered orally at the time of the pre-interview. A parent was asked to point to the response (Not true, Somewhat true, or Very true) that was most representative of the frequency of occurrence of the child's behavior during the past month. This inventory was administered again during the post-intervention interview.

The Behavior Problem items on the CBCL constitute multiple behavior-problem scales derived separately for different age and gender groups. The scales form two broad-band groupings: a) Externalizing Behavior which is identified as aggressive, anti-social, and under-controlled responses; and b) Internalizing Behavior which is identified as fearful, inhibited, and over-controlled responses. Raw scores on the CBCL are converted to T scores ranging from 0 to 100. Possible Behavior T scores range from 30 to 100 for boys and girls aged 4-5 years, which determine a child's behavior profile. The dependent variables were the sum of the ratings attained on the CBCL Externalizing and Internalizing scales respectively for boys and for girls.

The CBCL Externalizing Scale pre-intervention for Boys for this sample had a Cronbach's Alpha of .80 with a post intervention Cronbach's Alpha of .81. The CBCL Internalizing Scale for Boys pre-intervention Cronbach's Alpha was .80 with a post intervention Cronbach's Alpha of .66.

The CBCL Externalizing Scale pre-intervention for Girls for this sample had a Cronbach's Alpha of .81 with a post intervention Cronbach's Alpha of .66. The CBCL Internalizing Scale for Girls pre-intervention for this sample had a Cronbach's Alpha was .83 with a post intervention Cronbach's Alpha of .78.

#### Family Problem Solving Communication Index

The Family Problem Solving Communication Index (FPSC) (McCubbin, M., McCubbin, H., Thompson, 1988) was chosen as the instrument to measure the type and frequency of a parent's communication pattern. The FPSC assessed positive (Affirming) communication.

The quality of family communication determines to a large extent how families manage tension, problem solve and acquire a satisfactory level of family functioning, adjustment, and adaptation (McCubbin, M., McCubbin, H., & Thompson, 1988). The type and frequency of communication within the family system, particularly between parent and child, has a significant impact on the quality of their relationships.

The FPSC consists of ten items, which were scored on a four point Likert type scale: False; Mostly False; Mostly True; or True. A parent was asked to indicate the degree to which each statement about their family's pattern of communication was

characteristic (True) or not characteristic (False) of how their family system typically behaves.

A sample item from the FPSC was as follows:

Primary Statement: "When we face problems or difficulties in our family, we respond by ..."

Response Statement: "We yell and scream at each other."

A Likert-type scale card was provided and a parent responded by pointing to the response that best matched their attitude and behavior in relation to the test item.

Possible scores for the FPSC range from 0 to 30 with a higher score indicating more positive family communication. The dependent variable, affirming communication, was the obtained score on the FPSC. The FPSC Affirming Scale for this sample had a pre-intervention Cronbach's alpha of .89 and a post-intervention Cronbach's alpha of .91.

### Teacher Report Form

The Teacher Report Form (TRF) (Achenbach & Edelbrock, 1986) was selected to assess a Head Start teacher's report of student behavior. The TRF provided the investigator with a profile of the child's behavior in the pre-school environment. Total behavior rating scores ranged from 0 to 236 with a higher score reflecting a greater incidence of problem behaviors.

The TRF was chosen as the instrument to measure teacher's report of the child's behavior because the instrument provided the teacher's report of the child's externalizing or aggressive behavior and internalizing or withdrawn behavior. Head

Start teachers completed ratings for the 118 Behavior Problem items.

The TRF was designed to obtain teacher's ratings of children's behavior and consisted of many of the same problems that parents rated on the CBCL. Items with a low frequency of endorsements on the CBCL, such as running away and fire setting, were not included in the TRF. The TRF replaced 24 CBCL items, such as allergy, asthma, bowel movements outside toilet, with items that teachers would be better able to report, such as: 1) hums or makes odd noises in class, 2) fails to finish things he/she starts, and 3) defiant, talks back to staff. Nine items of the TRF were similar to the CBCL except for slight word changes, such as: "Doesn't get along with other children" versus "Doesn't get along with other pupils." The remaining items were identical on the two forms.

The 118 Behavior Problem items of the TRF measured the teacher's perception of the child's behavior and were scored using a 3 point Likert type scale with response alternatives of: Not true = 0; Sometimes true = 1; and Very true = 2. A sample Behavior Problem item of the TRF was: Can't sit still, restless, or hyperactive.

The Behavior Problem items on the TRF constitute multiple behavior-problem scales derived separately for different age and gender groups. The scales form two broad-band groupings: a) Externalizing Behavior which is identified as aggressive, anti-social, and under-controlled responses; and b) Internalizing Behavior which is identified as fearful, inhibited, and over-controlled responses. The dependent variables were the teacher's rating scores on the TRF Externalizing and Internalizing scales.

The TRF Externalizing Scale pre-intervention for Boys for this sample had a Cronbbach's Alpha of .57 with a post intervention Cronbach's Alpha of .59. The TRF Internalizing Scale for Boys pre-intervention for this sample Cronbach's Alpha was .48 with a post intervention Cronbach's Alpha of .45.

The TRF Externalizing Scale pre-intervention for Girls for this sample had a Cronbach's Alpha of .97 with a post intervention Cronbach's Alpha of .68. The TRF Internalizing Scale for Girls pre-intervention for this sample had a Cronbach's Alpha was .74 with a post intervention Cronbach's Alpha of .76.

Total Behavior rating scores ranged from 0 to 236 with a higher score reflecting a greater incidence of problem behaviors. Teachers were asked to complete this rating scale for all of the children in their classroom two weeks prior to the beginning of the study and again at the completion of the Best Families program. Teachers did not know which parents participated in the Best Families program.

#### Parent Satisfaction Questionnaire

The Parent Satisfaction Questionnaire was developed by the investigator as a measure of participants' satisfaction with the Best Families program (see Appendix B). The Parent Satisfaction Questionnaire consisted of three items using a 4-point, Likert-type response format. All questions were related to the perceived usefulness of the program in improving parent-child interaction and interpersonal interactions within a family and general context. The dependent variable was the total score derived from the three items on the Parent Satisfaction Questionnaire. In addition, participants were asked one Yes/No question; "Would you recommend the Best Families program to your friend or family?"

## Procedure

In the spring of 2001, Head Start family service workers were trained to complete the structured interviews and to administer the selected instruments. These measures included: 1) a Biographical Questionnaire, 2) the Beck Depression Inventory, (BDI) (Beck, 1972), 3) the Child-Rearing Style Interview (Shure, 1998), 4) the Child Behavior Checklist, (CBCL) (Achenbach & Edelbrock, 1983), and 5) the Family Problem Solving Communication Index, (FPSC) (McCubbin, et al., 1988).

Two weeks prior to the beginning of the Best Families program, the Head Start family service worker assigned to a participating family completed the pre-treatment structured interview at the respective Head Start Center. The Head Start teachers completed the checklist of child behavior problems in the classroom using the Teacher Report Form for all of the children in their classrooms (Achenbach & Edelbrock, 1986).

The Best Families program was offered during the months of July and August 2001. The participants at each Head Start Center selected the time of day that was most convenient for them. Two of the groups (Groups 2 and 3) met one week night a week (Tuesday or Thursday) from 6:00 to 9:00 PM. For these groups, dinner was provided both for the adults and the children. One group (Group 1) met Tuesday afternoon between 12:30 and 3:30 PM. For this group, lunch was provided. Transportation to the Head Start Centers and child care at the Centers were provided by the participating Head Start Centers.

In early July, 2001, this researcher began the four-week Best Families parenting education intervention program with one group in each of the three Head

Start Centers. Each week participants, by signing the attendance sheet, indicated their willingness to participate in the parenting education intervention program and gave their permission to video tape the session. (See Appendix D)

Weekly agendas specified the activities planned for each session and the problem solving and communication strategies to be practiced. (See Appendix C) Handouts described suggested activities for participants to practice at home to develop further the specific problem solving and communication skills and strategies presented during the learning modules. A “buddy system” also was initiated during the first session of the Best Families program to assist parents in fostering social support among them.

### Data Analysis

Data analyses were conducted using SPSS for Windows, version 10.0. For all analyses, the level of statistical significance was established at  $p < .05$ .

#### Research Question 1

Did participation in the Best Families program affect the level of the parents' child-rearing style as measured by Shure's (1998) Child-Rearing Style Interview? To assess the significance of the change in the level of the parents' child-rearing style, a Repeated Measures ANOVA was used.

#### Research Question 2

Did participation in the Best Families program increase positive affirmative communication as measured by the Family Problem Solving Communication Index (FPSC), (McCubbin, M., McCubbin, H., & Thompson, 1988)? A repeated Measures

ANOVA was used to assess the significance of the change in affirming communication.

### Research Question 3

Were parents who participated in the Best Families intervention satisfied with the program as measured by the Parent Satisfaction Questionnaire? Descriptive data were used to describe the level of participants' satisfaction with the Best Families program. A 3-item scale was constructed, and the mean and standard deviation were calculated. In addition, the frequency distribution of one item concerning whether participants would recommend the Best Families program to a friend or family also was examined.

### Research Question 4

Was there a change in parents' ratings of their children's behavior problems at home as measured by the Child Behavior Checklist (CBCL), (Achenbach & Edelbrock, 1983)? Repeated Measures ANOVAs were conducted for boys and for girls to examine changes in Externalizing and Internalizing behavior problems.

### Research Question 5

Was there a change in teacher's ratings of the children's behavior in school as measured by the Teacher Report Form (TRF) (Achenbach & Edelbrock, 1986) after their respective parents' participated in the Best Families program? Repeated Measures ANOVAs of the Head Start teachers' ratings were conducted to assess the significance of a change in Externalizing and Internalizing Behaviors for both boys and girls at school.

## Summary

This chapter has described the research design, the sampling frame, the participants, the intervention, Best Families, the instruments used to evaluate the efficacy of Best Families program, the procedures, and the data analysis used in this study.

## Chapter 4: Results

This chapter is divided into seven sections. First, the purpose of the study will be described. Next, data clean up prior to the analysis will be described. Next the five research questions will be addressed and results reported.

### Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to evaluate the effect of the Best Families program on parents' child-rearing styles, parent-child communication, and parents' and teachers' ratings of the children's behavior. Best Families was a four-week program that was developed specifically for economically disadvantaged parents of 4 to 5 year old children enrolled in Head Start programs in a mid-Atlantic state. Specifically, this study sought to determine the effects that participation in the Best Families program had on parents' ability to use a social problem solving approach to child-rearing through the understanding, development, and implementation of social problem solving and communication strategies. The information provided in this study was sought to assist Head Start Agencies to provide effective parenting education to all parents being served through their programs.

Best Families program was based on the substantial research (Webster-Stratton, 1999, Okagaki, L., D. & Divechi, D. J. (1993) which indicated that parenting skill deficits are a key risk factor in the development and maintenance of problem behaviors. The major component of the Best Families intervention involved parent training focused on social problem solving skills, communication style, and adequate

peer and family support systems. This four-week parenting education program consisted of weekly parent group meetings, nine to eleven parents met for two hours once a week, and was instructed by the researcher. A discussion process was designed to collaborate with parents, encourage problem solving, and empower parents through the support provided by the group and the program's emphasis on self-management. Program topics included: 1) problem solving, 2) positive communication, 3) verbal expression of feelings, and 4) supportive relationships. To help ensure that the training was relevant, participants were encouraged to share their experiences in the implementation of the various strategies they had tried. Discussions on these topics encouraged self-assessment in the various topic areas. In order to insure the integrity of the intervention, the instructor followed the detailed training manual for each session.

### Data Clean-Up

Prior to data analysis, a check on data entry, missing data, skewness, and kurtosis was conducted on all variables using SPSS Frequencies and SPSS Explore (SPSS, 1999). The first step was to examine univariate descriptive statistics. For each continuous variable, the minimum and maximum values, mean, and standard deviation were inspected for plausibility. For each discrete variable, the values were checked for out-of-range numbers.

### Qualitative Data

The Best Families program was presented in it's entirety three times, once in each of three participating Head Start centers. The participants in each center were

parents who volunteered for the program. This section will provide descriptive data for one group, which is representative of the group process.

There were nine participants in Group Three. Four of the participants were African American, four were Latina, and one was Caucasian. Four of the parents were single, four were married, and one was separated. Two of the participants in the group had less than a high school education, two had earned a General Equivalency Diploma and five had received a high school diploma. The mean age of the participants in Group Three was 31.3 years with a range in age from 23 to 41. Two of the participants in the group were unemployed, three were employed as laborers, and four were employed as aides or cashiers. All of the participants in this group had more than one child.

#### Case 301 Beth

##### Background Information

Beth was a twenty three year old African American woman. She was single, had never been married, and lived with the same paramour for several years. Beth had five children, four daughters and one son. Her four-year-old daughter, Sandra, was enrolled in the participating Head Start program. Beth had earned her G.E.D. She has never been employed; but she reported that she was currently looking for employment. Beth reported on the Biographical Questionnaire that she had not previously attended any parenting education programs. She expressed interest in participating in the Best Families parenting training program. Her goal was to develop strategies and skills to more effectively manage her children. Beth scored 23

on the Beck Depression Inventory (Beck, 1972), a score consistent with a low-moderate level of depression.

### Child-Rearing Style – Pre Intervention

Interview: The Child-Rearing Style Interview (Shure, 1998), which identifies five Child-Rearing Styles, was completed according to Shure's guidance. The five Child-Rearing styles identified by Shure (1992) are:

- 1) Power Assertion, which is based on threats, commands, demands, belittling, name-calling, and spanking – any negative communication.  
Also in this category are statements of child non-involvement, such as, “Don’t worry, I’ll talk your teacher about it,” when for example, a child comes home from school and says “Tommy hit me.” Now the child doesn’t have to think about the problem at all. His mother will solve it for him.
- 2) Positive Alternatives, which is based on telling a child what to do in a positive fashion without an explanation such as: “Share your toys.” “Toys belong in your bedroom.”
- 3) Simple Explanations with Moral Overtones, which is based on telling a child what to do and implying morality such as: “We don’t hit our friends, was that a nice thing to do?”
- 4) Induction/ Reasoning/ Explanation (including feelings), which is based on telling a child what to do with a reasonable explanation such as: “You won’t have any friends if you grab toys.”
- 5) Problem Solving, I Can Problem Solve Dialoguing which asks rather than tells a

child to identify the situation such as: “What happened? What’s the problem?”

The Child-Rearing Style Interview is scored by considering three types of parent responses:

1) Parent responses are scored according to the Child Rearing Styles identified above.

2) “Why” questions.

A. Non-information seeking “why” questions:

The question “Why did you do that?” is usually a non-information seeking question. If the parent comes back with “her agenda” regardless of what the child says, the response is scored a ‘1’. For example: Responses such as “Why did you hit him!” should be scored a ‘1’ on the Child-Rearing Style Interview.

B. Information seeking “Why” questions

Some “why” questions are genuine information seeking questions which seek to obtain information from the child to use in further dialogue and are scored according to the follow-up response. For example: If the statements or questions following the “why” indicated that the parent listened and responded to what the child said , the “why” is scored a ‘5’.

3) Any parent statement irrelevant to the problem should not be coded.

The final score is the sum of the scores from 1 to 5 for the coded statements divided by the total number of coded statements.

During the Child-Rearing Style Interview (Shure, 1998), Beth selected the

following problems to report: "My daughter was hanging upside down in a tree." In response to the interviewer's question: "What did you do?" Beth responded: "I got scared. I told her to get her butt out of the tree before she got hurt." This response was a Level Three, Simple Explanation, response. She continued: "My daughter was scared to come down but then I explained that she could get hurt and I helped her down." Beth responded with a Level Three, Simple Explanation response. Beth then revealed another problem she experienced with her daughter: "My daughter hits my baby who is one-year-old." When queried as to her response, she said: "I tell her to stop because she's just a baby, but Sandra pinches her, and sometimes I don't find out that she did until I see bruise marks." This was a Level Three, Simple Explanation, response. In response to the interviewer's question: "Then what happened?" She responded "My daughter said: "She hit me first." Beth reported: "Many times I threaten to spank my daughter to make her quit hurting the baby, but she continues to hurt her baby sister." This response was a Level One, commanding response. Beth continued: "I just don't know what to do." Beth's responses were classified as Level Three, Simple Explanations with Moral Overtones.

#### Child-Rearing Style Interview - Post Intervention

Beth selected the following problem to report during the Child-Rearing Style Interview after she participated in the Best Families program: "My daughter won't clean her room." Beth's responses during the Child-Rearing Style Interview indicated that she had progressed from a Level Three, Simple Explanations, style to a Level Four, Induction/Reasoning/ Explanation (including feelings) which is based on telling a child what to do with a reasonable explanation.

### Observation of Participation During the Parenting Classes

The goal of the Best Families Parenting Training program was to assist the participants to develop social problem solving strategies to use in their child-rearing practices.

#### Social Problem Solving

The objectives of Learning Module I were to introduce social problem solving strategies to the participants and to have the participants identify a problem with their child that they would like to resolve during the workshop. The skills to be developed during this Learning Module were the ability to develop the language of problem solving, to identify the problem and to generate alternatives.

Beth selected the following problem to report during the parenting training classes: "My daughter, Sandra, hits and pinches my one year old daughter." She also selected the following problem as the one that she chose to resolve during the parenting training classes: "My daughter refuses to pick up her toys which she scatters all over the room."

Beth generated alternatives with the group members relating to rewards or options available when her daughter picked up her toys. Some alternatives and consequences that she suggested were: "We could go swimming." "I could build a puzzle with her." "I could take her to McDonalds and get her a hamburger." She suggested an option for acknowledging her daughter's compliance with her request: "You could make a game of it." Beth suggested alternative behaviors for relieving stress and taking time for herself: "Take a ride, like me and Clara do." "Just laugh and joke, and just have fun."

Beth discussed her success with the implementation of social problem strategies when she wanted her children and Clara's children to pick up their room and stated: "When I got into her room, you know, Calm Down." Beth was applying social problem solving strategies to herself in an attempt to organize her thoughts and feelings.

Beth participated as herself in the following role play which was a scenario that Beth described she had used with her daughter:

INSTRUCTOR: See, okay. Now can we role play this? Can you read my writing? Now, who wants to be the mother and who wants to be the child? All you have to do is go through these, but we just want to role play and see how it feels.

MARTY: I'll be the child.

BETH: I'll be the mother.

INSTRUCTOR: Okay, you'll be the mother? Why don't you pull the chairs over together and you can see this, all right? Okay, let's go back to the beginning. You're going to say this. You're the mother, right? So you're going to say, "I get upset when you leave your toys all over the floor because I'm afraid somebody's going to fall and get hurt," right? "I want you to put your toys in the toy box when you're not playing with them."

And then Marty is going to restate what you said, she's going to say that to you, what you said. So after you say that, then, "Now tell me what I said to you," okay? And you want to look her right in the

eye, and you want to have a gentle tone of voice, you want your body posture to be non-threatening. You know, I have a habit of doing this, and that's --

MARTY: Me too.

INSTRUCTOR: So you don't want to do that. We want to speak gently, we want our body posture to be inviting. We've got a problem, we want to problem solve okay? So you say that to her, if you can read it, and then ask Marty to repeat it to you. Look her in the eye maintain eye contact with her. Because when she states it back, what she's doing is clarifying what you said. Sometimes kids go off half-cocked, and they only hear part of what you said. This way if they say it back to you, and then you say: "Yeah, that's right, that's exactly what I said." Okay, go.

BETH: Marty, I get upset when I see your toys all over the floor because I'm afraid someone might fall and get hurt.

INSTRUCTOR: I want –

BETH: I want you to put the toys in the toy box when you're not playing.

MARTY: So you get upset when you see my toys all over the floor?

BETH: Yes.

MARTY: And you're afraid somebody will get hurt?

BETH: Yes.

MARTY: You want me to put my toys in the toy box when I'm not

playing?

BETH: Yes.

INSTRUCTOR: "You have it right, that's what I said."

BETH: You have it right, that's what I said. If you pick up your toys, then we'll go swimming.

INSTRUCTOR: How do you say it so your voice -- if you pick up your toys, we'll go swimming.

BETH: If you pick up your toys, Mommy will take you swimming.

INSTRUCTOR: And if you don't pick your toys up?

BETH: And if you don't pick your toys up, Mommy's going to have to take away your TV.

INSTRUCTOR: And Mom's going to do that, right? Mom's going to take you swimming or take away your TV, right?

MARTY: So if I pick up my toys, we'll go swimming, right?

BETH: Yes.

MARTY: But if I don't pick up my toys, we'll miss TV?

BETH: Yes.

MARTY: I think I'm going to pick up my toys.

INSTRUCTOR: So you'd say, "Which one would you like?" Which one would you do?

BETH: You be a good boy then and pick up your toys.

INSTRUCTOR: No, not good boy, because being a good boy is what? If you're going to listen to me, that's what you want. We want to be

very, very specific, okay? So you say, "Okay, you're going to pick up your toys, I'll help you." Or, "Let's make a game of it, okay? Get your toys picked up and we'll go swimming." And you go swimming that day, right? So you kind of set yourself up. Whenever I say do a plan, have an action, and develop that, you have to think about it. If I promise Marty I'm going to take her swimming, then I say: "I don't have time," what's going to happen?

BETH: He's going to be upset and he's not going to believe you.

INSTRUCTOR: Exactly; you have already lost the trust, you set yourself up. So if you won't go swimming, maybe you could build a puzzle with them, okay? So think about what you're saying you're going to do, and then do it, okay? If it's a day where you can't go swimming, you could say, "If you pick your toys up --" I don't know how old your children are, but four year olds like to hear a story or those kinds of things, then you read a story to them or build a puzzle or play a game with them. They like those card games, playing Fish and card games like that.

BETH: A puzzle.

INSTRUCTOR: Right, because they're doing something with you. And after he's done that with you, you say, "All week you have been picking up your toys, you have been so good doing it, I'll take you swimming." See, it kind of is a pay-off.

### Verbal Regulation of Emotions

The objectives of Learning Module II were to assist the participants to develop verbal skills and strategies for accurate verbal expression. The skills to be developed during this Training Module were to have participants identify verbally what emotions they are feeling in particular situations and the ability to express these emotions in an appropriate fashion.

Beth expressed her feelings of frustration and helplessness which appeared to be related to some significant adults in her life: "Ways you can never do anything right." Beth also described feelings of goodness and honor: "It feels like if your kids are in daycare, it feels good, just like you honor yourself for being here. But like now, I mean my kids are not here. I'm free now, just sitting in this class." She continued: "'I used to worry about me with this.' When queried what "this" meant, Beth replied: "You know, hitting or hurting your child." Beth then commented: "That's what I do, I stop and get calm." She held five fingers up in the air to indicate that she needed to take a five minute break. Beth was attempting to regulate her emotion through the use of social problem solving strategies and affirming communication.

### Affirming Communication

The goal of Learning Module III was to assist the participants to develop more positive communication styles. The skills to be developed were the ability to identify problems, to generate alternatives, to evaluate the consequences, and to reframe problems. Participants were encouraged to express their wants and needs in a positive fashion, rather than reacting in a blaming fashion and to develop an understanding of the effects of their negative communication on their child's behavior.

Beth expressed how she had changed her communication with her daughter when she requested that her daughter clean her room. She reported that she used more positive statements such as those practiced in class: "You need to pick up the toys in your room." "If you pick up your toys and put them away, then I will take you to get a cheeseburger." Beth revealed her sensitivity to other individual's words and hurtful behaviors with the following comments: "Slurs." "People contradicting themselves." "Ways you can never do anything right." She began to gain an awareness of the effect her statements had on her daughter.

### Social Support

The goal of Learning Module IV was to assist the participants to develop supportive relationships with others. The skills to be developed during the fourth session were to develop awareness and understanding of the importance of giving, as well as getting, support from others.

Beth's main source of support appeared to come from her friend Clara, who also participated in this study, and her mother. She described Clara's support for her as follows: "Me and Clara had nine people at the house. We (she and Clara) took them all to McDonald's and got them cheeseburgers." Beth described another situation when she received support from Clara: "I got out my kids books and stuff for school, and she (Clara) said, 'I guess I'll walk you there.'"

Beth alluded to her mother's support during a discussion about taking time for one's self. The instructor asked: "What happens whenever it is your time? Do you get a babysitter?" Beth responded: "My Mom." Beth also talked of giving support and nurturing others: "Say for instance your feet was all swelled up, and I put pillows

under them, right? It's the same thing as being helpful."

### Summary

Beth was very quiet during the first parenting training class. She began to participate in the role-playing scenarios and eventually became an active participant in the discussions. Throughout the sessions she began to practice social problem solving strategies, to generate alternatives, and to evaluate consequences of particular behaviors. Beth reported, with pride, that she had successfully implemented the social problem solving strategies taught in the workshop.

INSTRUCTOR: So, you were the one having your kids pick up their room so they could go swimming?

BETH: Uh-huh.

INSTRUCTOR: Am I right? Did you try that?

BETH: I didn't take them swimming, I told them McDonald's and I took them.

INSTRUCTOR: Did you?

BETH: We had -- as a matter of fact, we took nine.

INSTRUCTOR: Nine?

BETH: Because it was me and Clara. And, you know, they all ate together, there was a whole bunch of us. And I knew when I got in their room, you know, calm down. And I used to worry about me with this. And I had one picking up, and we had them all in the room there.

INSTRUCTOR: Okay.

BETH: And I had them each folding blankets, and I helped each one.

INSTRUCTOR: So you were working on it, you had them all together, you worked on it, the job got done, and you felt good about it?

BETH: Yep.

INSTRUCTOR: Did that work for you?

BETH: Yep, it works.

INSTRUCTOR: No one was upset then?

BETH: Yep. I put on so many lights, and got it done.

BETH: I told her (Marty) what we did, I told her we had nine kids, that we were folding blankets.

INSTRUCTOR: She (Beth) tried what we talked about.

MARTY: How did it work?

BETH: It did.

MARTY: It did?

BETH: Me and Clara had nine people at the house. I said; "you all be quiet and we'll take you down to McDonald's. If one person say something, it mess it up for everybody." No one said nothing to me. We took them all to McDonald's and got them cheeseburgers.

Beth's responses during the Child-Rearing Style Interview (Shure, 1998) after she participated in the program supported this change in her social problem solving skills and abilities. Some of her responses were: "You need to pick up the toys in your room." This response was a Level Two, Positive Alternative, response. "If you pick up your toys and put them away, then I will take you to get a cheeseburger." This response was a Level Five, Problem Solving, response.

During one of the parenting training classes, Beth expressed feelings of frustration and powerlessness when she encountered a problem within her family. Beth became involved in the program and began to implement some of the social problem-solving strategies she had practiced during class. She appeared ecstatic when she reported her successful implementation of an IF-THEN strategy she used with her child. She exclaimed to the group: "I tried it and it really worked!" Another participant quickly responded: "Tell us how you did it?" This success appeared to empower and motivate other group members to continue to develop and to implement effective child-rearing strategies. Beth's child-rearing style changed from a Level One-Power Assertion to a Level Four-Induction/Reasoning/Explanation Style, which indicates a change of three levels in a positive direction of her child-rearing style. She developed more confidence in her ability to manage her children and implemented the social problem solving strategies taught during parenting education classes with her children at her home as noted in the above dialogue. Beth was proud of the success she had achieved with the implementation of the social problem solving strategies and expressed disappointment that the parenting training was ending.

### Case 302 Clara

#### Background Information

Clara was a 23 year old African American woman. She was the single mother of two children; a five-year-old son and a four-year-old daughter, Quasha. Quasha was enrolled in a participating Head Start program. Clara resides in subsidized

housing with her paramour and her two children. Clara was expecting her third child during her participation in the Best Families program. Clara graduated from high school and had completed two courses as an undergraduate student at the local Community College. Clara was employed as a teacher's assistant at the local Head Start Agency. Clara reported on the Biographical Questionnaire that she had attended prior parenting training; however, she explained that the focus of the training was a behavior modification approach rather than a social problem solving approach. Clara scored 6 on the Beck Depression Inventory (Beck, 1972), a score consistent with the absence of depression.

#### Child-Rearing Style – Pre Intervention

Clara selected the following problem to report during the Child-Rearing Style Interview (Shure, 1998): "In school she becomes a little destructive." Clara said that she asked her: "What is wrong?" Her daughter replied: "Nothing." Her daughter's behavior in the Head Start program resulted in a power struggle between the teacher, Clara, and Quesha. Quesha's behavior in the classroom was reported as very aggressive and at times quite dangerous. Staff had to get either Clara or Quesha's grandmother to intervene on several occasions to protect the other children in the classroom from her violent outbursts. Both Clara and her mother are employed by the Head Start agency. Quesha would get violent when she was not permitted to do what she wanted or when staff advised her that it was time for a different activity. Quesha would act out in a violent fashion by throwing chairs around the classroom, running around the classroom, and screaming in a loud voice. Quesha would attempt to run

out of the classroom and go to the outside of the building. Clara reported during the Child-Rearing Style Interview that she would ask Quesha: “What is wrong?” (in relation to the staff calling her to remove her child from the classroom because she was out of control). Clara reported that her daughter said: “It wasn’t my fault.” Clara reported that her daughter suffers from ADHD and experienced difficulty with impulse control. Clara indicated that her daughter’s aggressive outbursts were due to a misunderstanding by the staff because her daughter was unable to change her aggressive behavior. Clara’s responses during the Child-Rearing Style Interview were difficult to rate because she would only blame the teaching staff for Quesha’s behavior. Clara’s child-rearing style was rated Level Two, Positive Alternatives, based on the observed responses she gave to her child during the morning that Clara completed the structured interview. Observations included Clara’s response to her daughter in the hallway when she refused to comply with the teacher request that she come into the classroom. Clara said to her daughter: “You have to go in there!” This was a Level Two, Positive Alternative, response. Her daughter responded with a loud: “No!” Then Clara said to Quesha: “You have to go to school.” “You can’t stay in the hallway.” These responses were Level Two, Positive Alternative responses. Quesha again said in a loud voice: “No!” Clara then asked the teacher to come into the hallway with her daughter so that she, Clara, could complete her interview. The teacher’s assistant came out into the hallway and had Quesha assist her with decorating the hallway with some crepe paper. Clara’s responses during the Child-Rearing Style Interview indicated that she is either unable or unwilling to address her daughter, Quesha’s, extreme and aggressive behaviors in the classroom.

### Child-Rearing Style Interview - Post Intervention

Clara selected the following problem to report during the Child-Rearing Style Interview (Shure, 1998) after she participated in the Best Families program: "My daughter keeps leaving her classroom and cries to come to me." Clara said to her daughter: "Quesha, why do you keep coming out of the classroom and crying for me?" Clara's responses during the Child-Rearing Style Interview after she participated in the Best Families program were rated a Level Three, Simple Explanations. Clara used social problem solving statements during the interview that indicated that she was attempting to incorporate some of the social problem solving strategies taught during the Best Families program into her child-rearing style. Her use of "if-then" statements and follow through were: "If you stay in your room, then I will take you to McDonalds for lunch." Her daughter returned to her classroom still crying. Later Clara went into her classroom and said to her: "Remember McDonalds for lunch." Clara's interactions with her daughter indicated that she was experiencing difficulty managing her daughter's behavior, but she was attempting to use more effective strategies with her child. She appears to have benefited from the parenting education classes. It is interesting to note that the problems she identified with her daughter during the Child-Rearing Style Interview, both before and after she participated in the Best Families program, were classroom related issues rather than problematic situations experienced in the home.

## Observation of Participation During the Parenting Classes

### Problem Solving

Clara selected the following problem to report during the parenting training classes: “My daughter is like that too, she will not pick up her toys that are all around the house.” Clara generated alternatives for managing time for herself as, she could take “a night out.” After a long discussion about how to build time into the day for yourself, Clara clarified what we were discussing by asking: “You mean scheduling time for yourself. Is that what you’re saying?”

### Verbal Regulation of Emotion

Clara experienced difficulty participating in discussions about identifying feelings and appropriate alternatives to angry reactions. She responded with silence, at times laughter, and generally attempted to separate herself from the discussion.

Several times during the classes she would just look down and remain out of the group process.

### Affirming Communication

Clara was quick to support her friend, Beth, during a discussion about the effects of negative communication. Beth described hurtful communication as “slurs” and Clara responded: “That’s right.” Clara appeared to be interested in this discussion although she only minimally participated. Clara supported other’s comments about communication that both hurts and hinders us. She would nod her head in agreement or say: “That’s right.”

### Social Support

Clara had developed support systems through her involvement with her work, her family, and her friends, particularly Beth. She was also quick to support other participants' suggestions and alternatives during class. Clara's friend, Beth, discussed the support she receives from Clara and Clara would always smile and nod her head in an affirmative fashion to indicate that the support to which Beth referred was mutual. Beth referred to the two of them (Beth and Clara) alternating weekends to have some time alone; Clara further explained: "Yes, that's what we do to help each other." Clara acknowledged that she enjoys reading during this discussion by commenting: "Me too." She suggested: "... to wait until they're (children) asleep" when discussing ways to build some time for self care into your days.

### Summary

Clara would best be described as a reluctant participant during most of the parenting training classes. Throughout the sessions she did begin to develop strategies, to generate alternatives and evaluate appropriate consequences for use with her daughter. Given more time, she may have been able to lessen her defenses and become involved with the group process.

### Case 303 Jenny

#### Background Information

Jenny was a petite, 26 year old Caucasian female. She was the single parent of two children, a 3-year-old son and a 5-year-old daughter, Tie'Eisha, who was

enrolled in a participating Head Start program. Jenny resided in subsidized housing with her mother and her children. Jenny completed 1.5 years of college, and was employed as a clerk at a Wal-Mart Store. Jenny reported on the Biographical Questionnaire that she had not attended prior parenting training, and she expressed interest in participating in the Best Families program. Her goal was to develop more effective strategies to use with her daughter. Jenny scored 2 on the Beck Depression Inventory (Beck, 1972), a score consistent with the absence of depression.

#### Child-Rearing Style - Pre Intervention

Jenny selected the following problem to report during the Pre-Child-Rearing Style Interview (Shure, 1998) as: "My daughter wanted to watch a movie and would not go to bed." Jenny's responses during the Child-Rearing Style Interview were: "Come, it's time to go to bed." This response was a Level Three response, which was telling with an explanation. She reported that her daughter had a set bedtime. Her daughter replied: "Please Mommy, let me watch this movie." Jenny continued: "No, you have to go to bed!" This response was rated Level One, a commanding response. Jenny would not listen to her daughter's request. Her daughter replied: "I don't want to go to bed." Jenny replied: "Go to bed now!" Jenny's response became commanding and demanding and was rated Level One. Jenny's responses during the Pre Child-Rearing Style Interview were rated as Level Three, Simple Explanations, which is based on telling a child what to do in a positive fashion with an explanation. Rating, summing, and averaging the response ratings achieved this rating. Jenny responded with one Level Two response, "Come, its time to go to bed" and followed

with two Level One responses, "No, you have to go to bed!" and "Go to bed now!" The numerical score achieved for the rated responses was 1.66, which was rounded to 2.0.

Jenny began this interaction with a Level Two, Positive Alternative, response "Come it's time to go to bed." When Tie' Eisha did not comply with her mother's request, Jenny responded with a commanding response: "Go to bed and now!"

#### Child Rearing Style Post Intervention

Jenny selected the following problem to report during the Child-Rearing Style Interview (Shure, 1998), after she participated in the Best Families program as: "My daughter argues with me about going to bed." Jenny's responses during the Child-Rearing Style Interview (Shure, 1998) after participating in the Best Families program were: "It will soon be time to go to bed." This is a Level Four response, using Induction and Reasoning and providing her daughter with time to prepare for this transition. Her daughter replied: "Okay." Tai'Eisha continued to watch the television and did not move. Jenny responded: "Now! It is time to go to bed." This response was rated a Level Three, Telling with a Simple Explanation. Her daughter replied: "No! I don't want to go to bed." Jenny continued, using the IF-THEN strategy taught in the Best Families program: "If you go to bed now, then I will come and read you a story." This response was rated a level Five, Problem Solving, because it provided her daughter with a choice. Her daughter replied: "Okay." Jenny's daughter went to the bedroom with her mother.

Jenny's responses during the post-intervention Child-Rearing Style Interview,

after she participated in the parenting training classes, resulted in a rating of Level Four, Induction/ Reasoning/ Explanation (including feelings), which is based on telling a child what to do with a reasonable explanation such as: "It will soon be time to go to bed." This rating was achieved by summing the numerical rating of the responses and dividing by the number of responses. Jenny received a numerical rating of 3.6, which was rounded to four. Jenny's rating of Level Four, Induction/ Reasoning/ Explanation reflected a change of two levels in a positive direction.

Jenny's responses began with a Level Four response: "It will soon be time to go to bed." However, when her daughter did not move as per Jenny's expectations, she lapsed into a demanding mode: "Now! It's time to go to bed!" Finally, she used a Level Five response, IF-THEN strategy, which effectively motivated her daughter to do as Jenny requested.

#### Observation of Participation During the Parenting Classes

#### Social Problem Solving

During the parenting education session, Jenny selected the following problem to report: "When I tell my daughter to do things, she always puts me off. When I tell her it is time to go to bed, it always ends up with her crying." Jenny experienced difficulty when her daughter did not comply with her request. However, when her daughter did not cooperate, Jenny's frustration would quickly surface, and she would switch to a commanding, demanding mode. The group members generated alternative responses for Jenny to use in situations that caused her distress. Some of these alternatives included: Jenny could take a favorite toy from her daughter when she did not comply, Jenny could give her daughter several minutes to comply, or

Jenny could use "if-then" statements to motivate her to do as she requested.

#### Verbal Regulation of Emotion

During a discussion about feelings, the participants described how they felt when they encountered a problem. Jenny responded: "I can't eat." This response was consistent with her level of frustration and anger. Later when discussing anger management, she responded: "I'm mad, so I talk loud." (Which was the same response another participant gave.) Throughout the sessions, Jenny began to develop an awareness of how her communication with her child directly affected the manner in which her child responded to her.

#### Affirming Communication

Jenny was in the habit of commanding and/or demanding that her daughter do as she requested. She expressed interest in learning how to communicate in a more effective manner. During a discussion about expressing one's feelings, Jenny said: "It's very difficult for me." She agreed with others in the group that she felt sad and powerless in many situations. Jenny contributed little information during the sessions, yet she explained to the Instructor that she practiced at home and felt that she was being successful.

#### Social Support

Jenny agreed with a nod of her head during most of the session. She did make arrangements on occasion to transport a friend home. When asked about her relationships, she reported: "They are okay." She appeared to be shy and retiring, yet she was liked by the other group members.

### Summary

Jenny was very quiet during the parenting training classes. She participated in a role-playing scenario but did not actively participate in the class discussions, which suggests that she was attending to and processing the information. Jenny would nod her head in agreement during most of the sessions, but that was the extent of her participation in the group. Throughout the sessions she began to develop social problem solving strategies, to generate alternatives and to evaluate consequences of particular behaviors for appropriate and effective use with her daughter. Her goal was to develop effective strategies to use with her daughter, and this goal was becoming reality.

Jenny's child-rearing style changed two levels in the direction of a problem solving approach to child-rearing. She did not participate much during the class discussions; however, she would communicate with the instructor and other participants during breaks and after class. Jenny reported that she practiced the social problem solving strategies that were taught, and she felt that she was beginning to communicate more effectively with her daughter, as well as others.

### Case 304 Anna

#### Background Information

Anna was a petite, 30 year old Latina. She was married and resided with her husband and two daughters. Anna's four-year-old daughter, Angel, was enrolled in a participating Head Start program. Anna earned her G.E.D. She was unemployed; she reported that she had been employed prior to the birth of her daughter and chose to

stay at home and raise her children. Anna reported on the Biographical Questionnaire that she had not attended prior parenting training. She expressed interest in participating in the Best Families program. Her goal was to develop effective strategies to use with her child. Anna scored 1 on the Beck Depression Inventory (Beck, 1972), a score consistent with the absence of depression.

#### Child-Rearing Style – Pre Intervention

Anna selected the following problem to report during the Child-Rearing Style Interview (Shure, 1998): "My child hits me back when I hit her for running around in Wal-Mart." When asked by the Interviewer how she responded when her child hit her, Anna reported that she told Angel: "Stop that or I will call your Father!" This was a Level One, commanding and threatening, response. Angel laughed and continued to run through the store. Anna then hollered at her daughter: "Get back here or I'm going to spank you!" This was a Level One, a commanding and threatening response. Her daughter responded: "Okay." Angel returned to Anna and Anna put Angel in the cart. Angel started to cry. Anna said to her daughter: "Stop crying or I really will spank you!" This response was again Level One, commanding and threatening. Her daughter, Angel continued to cry loudly and Anna hit her and said: "Stop it, now!" This was a Level One, commanding, demanding, response. Angel then hit her mother and began to sob. Anna's responses during the Child-Rearing Style Interview were rated Level One, Power Assertion, which is based on threats, commands, demands, belittling, name-calling, and spanking – any negative communication.

### Child-Rearing Style Interview - Post Intervention

Anna selected the following problem to report during the Child-Rearing Style Interview after participating in the Best Families program: "My daughter refuses to listen and runs in the store." When queried by the Interviewer about how she handled the situation, Anna responded that she tells her daughter: "We are going to the store and if you sit in the cart, I will buy you a toy." This was a Level Five, problem solving, response using the "if-then" social problem solving strategy. Angel asked: "Will you buy it now?" Anna responded: "No, IF you listen to me, THEN I will buy you a toy." Again Anna used a Level Five, problem solving, response to her daughter's request. Her daughter responded: "Okay." Anna reported that Angel's response not only surprised, but empowered her. Anna's responses during the Child-Rearing Style Interview post-intervention were rated Level Five - Problem Solving: I Can Problem Solve Dialoguing which asks rather than tells a child to identify the situation. Anna's social problem solving responses were: "We are going to the store and if you sit in the cart, I will buy you a toy." Her daughter asked: "Will you buy it now?" Anna followed through with her decision and used another social problem solving response. "No, IF you listen to me, THEN I will buy you a toy." Anna went from a Level One child-rearing style, Power Assertion, to a Level Five child-rearing style of Problem Solving which reflects a change of four levels in Anna's child rearing style.

### Observation of Participation During the Parenting Classes

#### Problem Solving

Anna selected the following problem to report during the parenting training classes: "My daughter refuses to listen to me and she leaves her toys all over the room." During a discussion of alternatives and consequences, Anna reported: "I put my daughter on restriction." She continued: "When she doesn't clean up, she don't get nothing to eat." The discussion about consequences continued and Anna advised that eventually: "she did it." When queried if her daughter Angel complied when Anna took away something, Anna replied: "She did it." "I say: I'm serious, just do it. Clean up my living room." "She (Angel) cried, but she did it." The group evaluated the consequence of not feeding your child and most of the group members agreed that this was not an appropriate consequence for a child.

#### Verbal Regulation of Emotion

During a discussion of alternatives for Anna to use during times of her expressed feelings of frustration and anger, the group members suggested that Anna take a time out. This strategy of time out for parents was introduced during the class. Anna expressed feelings of frustration and helplessness when she attempted to manage her daughter's inappropriate behavior and added: "Sometimes I just hit her with the fly-swatter." (Perhaps this was the reason that her daughter "did it"). Anna expressed her frustration and anger in physically aggressive and punitive terms. Anna recognized that she needed to set aside time for herself by stating: "I need quiet times." And then added: "You need a break."

### Affirming Communication

Anna learned to identify the problem behaviors that her daughter, Angel, exhibited that caused her to become frustrated and physically aggressive in response to her daughter's behavior. Anna stated: "When my daughter makes me embarrassed in a store I get very angry and want to hurt her to make her stop." Anna was able to generate more appropriate alternatives through group discussions relating to her situation. She began to gain an awareness of her negative communication style and suggested: "I could ask Angel to sit in the cart and then buy her something before we leave the store." Anna thus began to use social problem solving strategies and to gain an awareness of her punitive style of parenting, and the effect that her negative communication had on her daughter.

### Social Support

Anna participated in the 'buddy system' that was established for the group members. She was always willing to call others to remind them of the classes and offered transportation to them. Anna appeared to have adequate support from her husband and family. She was willing to assist when needed.

### Summary

Anna's responses during the pre-intervention Child-Rearing Style Interview were rated Level One, Power Assertion due to Anna's commanding, demanding, and belittling responses. Some of her Level One responses were: "Stop that or I will call your father!" "Stop crying or I will really spank you!" "Stop it now!"

Anna's responses during the Child-Rearing Style Interview after participation in the Best Families program were rated Level Five - Problem Solving. Anna's social

problem solving responses were: "We are going to the store and if you sit in the cart, I will buy you a toy." When her daughter asked: "Will you buy it now?" Anna followed through with her initial decision by using another social problem solving response. "No, IF you listen to me, THEN I will buy you a toy." This change represents a change in Anna's child-rearing style of four levels.

Anna was willing to participate in class activities and in the "buddy system" that was established to have class participants assist, remind, and support each other to actively participate in the Best Families program. Anna proved an invaluable asset with her willingness and resources to participate fully in all program activities.

Anna's goal was to develop appropriate and effective child-rearing strategies and skills to use with her children. Anna was a mother interested in improving her child-rearing style to assist her children to develop high self-esteem and to internalize appropriate behaviors. She approached classes with a teachable attitude of seeking what may be in her family's best interest. She left her employment at the time of the birth of her child to provide a stable, safe, learning environment for her daughter. Anna's pressing interest when she arrived in the United States from Mexico was to own her own home, to raise her children in a family environment, and to provide ample opportunities for her children to enjoy future success in their lives. Anna took full advantage of the Best Families program and expressed interest in attending future sessions of the Best Families program. Her goal was to learn as much as she could to assist her to better provide for her family. Anna was empowered after participation in the program, which speaks to the efficacy of the program.

## Case 305 Elina

### Background Information

Elina was a petite, 25 year old Latina. Elina was the single parent of a seven-year-old daughter and a four-year-old son, Daniel, who was enrolled in a participating Head Start program. She resided with her children and her paramour. Elina graduated from High School and completed 2 years of college. She was employed as a Life Care Assistant at a local Assisted Living Facility. Elina reported on the Biographical Questionnaire that she had not attended prior parent training. Her goal was to develop more effective strategies to use with her son. Elina scored 2 on the Beck Depression Inventory (Beck, 1972), a score consistent with the absence of depression.

### Child-Rearing Style – Pre Intervention

Elina selected the following problem to report during the Child-Rearing Style Interview (Shure, 1998): "My son turns my computer on and plays with it." When queried as to her actions when her son turns her computer on, she stated that she said: "Don't bother the computer or you will be punished!" Elina started with a commanding, threatening response, Level One. She reported that her son said: "Okay, Mommy." However, he continued to remain at the computer, which frustrated and angered her. She responded to him: "You better mean what you say, or you will be punished!" Elina gave a demanding, threatening response, Level One. Daniel remained at the computer. Elina went to the area and her son left the computer. Elina's responses during the Child-Rearing Style Interview were rated Level One,

Power Assertion, which is based on threats, commands, demands, belittling, name-calling, and spanking – any negative communication.

Child-Rearing Style Interview - Post Intervention

Elina selected the following problem to report during the Child-Rearing Style Interview after she participated in the Best Families program: "My son continually wants to play on my computer. He will go and turn it on and play with it when I am not looking." She responded to her son when he turned on the computer as follows: "Did Mommy tell you not to play with the computer?" This was a Level Four, Induction/ Reasoning/ Explanation, response. Her son replied: "Yes." Elina said: "Tell me why you went and turned it on?" Her son responded: "I don't know." These responses were not information seeking questions, but were Level Four, Induction/ Reasoning/ Explanation, responses. Elina then began to use social problem solving strategies: "How do you think Mommy feels when you don't listen to her?" This was a Level Five, Problem Solving, response. Her son responded: "Sad." She continued: "Will you listen to me and not turn the computer on?" Her son responded: "Yes." She again used a social problem solving response: "Can you find something else to play with?" Elina's responses during the Child-Rearing Style Interview Post Intervention resulted in a rating of Level 4 - Induction/ Reasoning/ Explanation (including feelings) which is based on telling a child what to do with a reasonable explanation. Elina's responses improved by three levels from a Level One, Power Assertion, based on threats, commands, demands, belittling, name-calling, and spanking to a Level Four, Induction/ Reasoning/ Explanation (including feelings) which is based on telling a child what to do with a reasonable explanation.

### Observation of Participation During the Parenting Classes

#### Social Problem Solving

Elina selected the following problem to report during the parenting education classes: "My son will go to my computer and turn it on. He will wait awhile and then play on it." Elina's son's persistence in playing on her computer resulted in power struggles between the two. Elina would become angry and frustrated with her son's behavior and then take some action whether or not it was appropriate. During a discussion of social problem solving skills, Elina was able to identify her son's problem, which she did as follows: "My son will go to my computer and turn it on. He will wait awhile and then play on it."

Elina was able to generate alternatives to her anger and frustration when her son does not comply with her requests. She suggested several alternative behaviors: "I could send my son to his room." "I could ask him if he could leave the room." "I could tell him to go outside and play."

#### Verbal Regulation of Emotion

Elina described her feelings as: "I'm always so tense worrying if I'm doing the right thing that it's hard for me to relax." Elina began to develop the ability to express her feelings in stressful situations. Elina's frustration with her son when he did not listen to her resulted in a power struggle between them. Elina would react to his behavior in a demanding, commanding fashion and Daniel would ignore her. She developed social problem solving strategies that assisted her to manage her son, rather than react to him. She attempted to develop a strategy that she could use in stressful

situations to more appropriately verbalize her feelings and maintain control of her behavior, particularly in situations that caused her to worry and fret. She generated the alternative of ‘walk away’ when we discussed actions one might take during stressful situations which would assist her to calm herself.

Elina expressed a need to be able to find time for herself and she expressed difficulty in being able to have leisure time: “It is very hard to take time for myself.” “It is very hard!” “Sometimes on Saturday I go shopping, but I worry if I spend money on myself. I worry about my kids.” She reported that she enjoyed time alone while her son attended Head Start: “When my son is here, at Head Start, sometimes I get home from work early and I take a little time for myself.”

### Affirming Communication

Elina participated in the discussion of communication styles and remarked that she gets distressed when: "people don't listen to you and always tell you what to do." She continued: "If you're not listening and still giving your own opinion, that's more or less not positive." Elina began to identify the effect that her communication had on her son's behavior.

Elina appeared to receive adequate support from others. She was also quick to support other participants during class time.

### Summary

Elina’s child-rearing style improved three levels, from Level One, Power Assertion, to Level Four, Induction/ Reasoning/ Explanation. As Elina continued to practice the social problem solving techniques she quickly developed social problem solving strategies.

Elina became frustrated with her son when he did not listen to her and would react to his behavior in a demanding, commanding fashion. She developed pro-active strategies that assisted her to more appropriately and effectively manage her son.

Elina attended the parenting education classes with an attitude of openness and desire for knowledge. Her goal was to develop appropriate and effective child-rearing strategies, which she felt that she was accomplishing. She reported that: "These strategies assist me with my work." She was willing and able to develop effective strategies for use in her life.

Elina actively participated during most of the classes. Elina engaged in class discussions and began to develop social problem solving strategies, to generate solutions, and to evaluate appropriate consequences for use with her son. Especially important was her willingness to gain an awareness of the effect that her negative communication had on her son's behavior.

### Case 306 Maria

#### Background Information

Maria was a 40-year-old Latina. She was married and the mother of 2 daughters, one age 19 and the other, Natalie, age 4, who was enrolled in a participating Head Start program. Maria resided with her husband and daughters. Maria completed the 8<sup>th</sup> grade and was employed as a laborer by the local poultry industry. Maria reported on the Biographical Questionnaire that she had not attended previous parenting training and she expressed a desire to participate in the Best

Families program. Her goal was to develop more effective strategies for managing her daughter, Natalie. Maria scored 8 on Beck Depression Inventory (Beck, 1972), a score consistent with the absence of depression.

### Child-Rearing Style – Pre Intervention

Maria selected the following problem to report during the Child-Rearing Style Interview (Shure, 1998) pre-intervention: "Natalie thinks that she is the boss and does not want to do what I tell her to do." When asked to describe a recent situation, she responded: "I told her to pick up her toys and she continued to watch TV." This was a Level One, commanding, response. She reported that when her daughter did not move, she became angry and said to her: "Natalie, stop watching TV and pick up your toys!" This was a Level One, commanding, demanding response. Natalie ignored her mother's command again. Maria, who by this time was very angry, yelled: "Natalie! Pick up your toys, now!" This was a Level One, commanding, demanding response. Her daughter responded: "OK, OK!" Her daughter continued to watch TV. Maria then said to her daughter: "I mean now!" Maria was very angry and again used a Level One response of commanding her daughter to pick up her toys. Her daughter held up one finger to indicate 'in a minute.' Maria stated that she then went to her daughter, took her hand, made her get up out of the chair, and pick up her toys. Her daughter became angry but complied with her directive and began picking up her toys.

Maria's responses during the pre-intervention Child-Rearing Style Interview were rated Level One - Power Assertion, which is based on threats, commands, demands, belittling, name-calling, and spanking – any negative communication.

Maria's interactions with her daughter that she described during the Child-Rearing Style Interview pre-intervention consisted of commands and demands and resulted in a power struggle between Maria and Natalie.

#### Child-Rearing Style Interview - Post Intervention

Maria selected the following problem to report during the Child-Rearing Style Interview after she had participated in the program: "My daughter will not listen to me." When queried as to a recent example of her daughter refusing to listen to her, Maria stated: "She will not pick up her toys." She said to her daughter: "Natalie, would you please pick up your toys?" This was a problem solving response because Maria gave Natalia a choice. Her daughter said: "Okay." She continues to play. Maria said to her: "If you pick up your toys, then mommy will take you to the park." Her daughter responded: "Okay." Natalie began picking up her toys.

Maria's responses on the Child-Rearing Style Interview after participation in the Best Families program were rated Level Five, Problem Solving. Maria's child-rearing style changed four levels from a Level One, Power Assertion, style, to a Level Five, Problem Solving, style.

#### Observation of Participation During the Parenting Classes

##### Problem Solving

Maria selected the following problem to report during the parenting training classes: "My daughter thinks that she is the boss and will not listen to me." She continued: "My daughter refuses to listen to me and she will not pick up her toys."

During a discussion of alternatives and consequences for behavior, Maria suggested: "I could send her to her room." This option would be preferred to one of anger and threats. Maria stated that what she does with her daughter: "It depends on how I'm feeling." Maria experienced difficulty with following through with her demands. The group discussed appropriate consequences for both acceptable and unacceptable behavior and Maria stated that when her daughter complies with her request she: "Gives her a hug and a kiss." Maria stated that she "probably wouldn't use any more restrictions with her daughter as a consequence for not listening." She explained that it doesn't work.

#### Verbal Regulation of Emotion

Maria experienced difficulty when she attempted to identify her feelings when confronted with a problematic situation. Her responses were always prefaced with: "It depends on how I'm feeling."

#### Affirming Communication

Maria learned to identify the problem behaviors that Natalie exhibited that caused her to become frustrated and physically aggressive with her. Maria stated: "When my daughter makes me embarrassed in a store I get very angry and want to hurt her to make her stop." Maria was able to generate more appropriate alternatives through group discussions relating to her situation. She slowly became aware of her negative communication style and she suggested: "I could ask her to sit in the cart and then buy her something before we leave the store." Maria thus began to use social problem solving strategies, such as: IF-THEN statements.

### Social Support

Maria participated in the 'buddy system' that was established for and by the group, which provided support and encouragement for the group members to remain actively involved with the program

Maria appeared to have adequate support from her husband and her family. She interacted well with the other participants in the class and willingly assisted when asked to do so.

### Summary

Maria actively participated in the class discussions and was eager to implement various social problem-solving strategies to more effectively manage her daughter. Maria's responses during the Child-Rearing Style Interview after participating in the Best Families program reflected the implementation of social problem solving strategies, particularly "if-then", that Maria practiced during class.

Maria had an adult daughter and she reported that her child-rearing strategies were effective with her older daughter but not with Natalie. Maria struggled to identify what she might do differently with her second daughter, Natalie, to increase her daughter's compliance and to lessen her frustration with Natalie when she did not comply with her requests.

Maria diligently attempted to implement new strategies with her daughter during the parenting training classes, particularly the use of "if-then" statements. She discovered a new method of managing her daughter and more effective methods for managing problematic situations. She started the Best Families program with a desire for change in her family environment and that enabled her to have an open mind to

new ideas. Her goal was to lessen her frustration and anger with her daughter and in that she reported that she was having success. Maria expressed disappointment when the program ended and requested that she be notified of future parenting training sessions.

### Case 307 Maria

#### Background Information

Maria was a petite, 33 year old Latina. Maria was separated from her husband and she resided in subsidized housing with her three sons, a four year old, a five year old, and a 15 year old. Elijah, her five year old son, was enrolled in a participating Head Start program. Maria completed 9 years of school and was employed as a laborer for the local poultry industry. Maria reported on the Biographical Questionnaire that she had not attended parenting training and she expressed interest in participating in the Best Families program. Her goal was to develop more effective strategies to use with her son, Elijah. Maria scored 5 on the Beck Depression Inventory (Beck, 1972), a score consistent with the absence of depression.

#### Child-Rearing Style Interview – Pre-Intervention

Maria selected the following problem to report during the Child-Rearing Style Interview (Shure, 1998): “He broke the remote control for the TV.” Elijah’s aggressive behaviors usually resulted in power struggles between he and his mother.

She reported that she asked her son: “Why did you break that?” This was a Level One, accusatory response. Elijah shrugged his shoulders, laughed and ran out of the house. This made Maria very angry and she called to him: “Come back now!” This was a Level One, commanding response. Maria sent her older son out to bring Elijah back to her. Elijah responded: “Leave me alone!” Then Maria responded: “Oh! You never listen!” This was Level One, accusatory, response. Maria reported that at this point she either gives up or the confrontation will result in corporal punishment.

Maria’s responses during the Child-Rearing Style Interview pre-intervention were rated Level One, Power Assertion.

#### Child-Rearing Style Interview – Post-Intervention

The following problem was selected by Maria to report during the Child-Rearing-Style Interview after she attended the Best Families program: “My son hits me when I tell him to clean up.” She reported that when her son hit her, she said: “Stop hitting me!” This was a Level One, commanding, response. Elijah just laughed. Maria responded: “Mommy feels bad when you hit her.” This was a Level Three, Simple Explanation with Moral Overtones, response. Elijah left the room. Maria’s responses during the Child-Rearing Interview post-intervention were rated Level Two, Positive Alternatives and is based on telling a child what to do. This Level Two rating was a change of one level in Maria’s child-rearing style in a positive direction.

#### Observation of Participation During the Parenting Classes

##### Problem Solving

Maria selected the following problem to report during the parenting training

classes: "My son won't listen to me." She explained that she had been called by the Center Manager of the Head Start program about the problems they were experiencing with her son, Elijah. She indicated with a shrug of her shoulders that she did not know what to do about his behavior. During a discussion of alternatives and consequences for behaviors, Maria suggested: "I could send my son to his room." She also reported that she would wait for her son to do as she requested. If her son did not comply with her request, she would get her 15 year old son involved and have him discipline Elijah. Maria also suggested other alternatives: "Send him to his room." "Refuse to let him watch TV."

#### Verbal Expression of Emotion

During a discussion of alternatives for solving a problem with friends, Maria suggested: "I would talk about the problem." Maria described her feelings when she experiences a problem with a friend or others: "I worry." "I wonder if I have hurt their feelings." She expressed great concern about her friends. She continued: "I ask if I have done something wrong."

#### Affirming Communication

During a discussion on how our communication affects others, Maria said: "I'm trying to work things out with my son." She experienced difficulty with the idea that her communication with her son could be a factor in his inappropriate behaviors. As the discussion continued, Maria said: "I don't know how to do it right. But now, maybe (I can learn) another way." Maria gave the impression of her powerlessness with managing her son, which is evident in the following statement: "It makes me question myself because there is a need for things to be better."

### Social Support

Maria's support system appeared to be elsewhere. She shrugged off the notion of a "buddy system" and appeared disconnected from the other members of the group. She was minimally involved with the activities during class. She spoke often of going to New York over the weekends.

### Summary:

Maria was a tragic figure and quite passive with her children. Most of the time she ignored their behavior and reported: "They just won't listen to me." At the close of one parenting training class, her two sons began to run in and out of the building. The individual in charge of the children was concerned about their safety and responded by asking them to stay inside the building. They ignored her request and the care giver came and asked Maria to keep them in the building. Maria ignored her request and her sons' behaviors. The boys laughed and continued to run in and out of the building. Eventually all individuals were out of the building and it was locked. The boys went to Maria's car and jumped in the back seat. Maria went to the driver's seat, got inside the car and drove away while her sons continued jumping around in the back seat.

### Case 308 Marty

#### Background Information

Marty was an obese, 31 year old African American woman. She was the

single parent of two sons, aged 11 and 4. She resided in subsidized housing with her two sons. Her four year old son, Richard, was enrolled in the participating Head Start program. Marty graduated from high school and was currently attending the local Community College to complete an Associate Degree in Early Childhood Studies. Marty was employed as a teacher's assistant at the local Head Start Agency. Marty expressed interest in participating in the Best Families program. Her goal was to develop more effective strategies to use with her son. Marty scored 16 on Beck Depression Inventory Self-Assessment (Beck, 1972), a score consistent with the absence of depression.

#### Child-Rearing Style – Pre Intervention

Marty selected the following problem to report during the Child-Rearing Style Interview (Shure, 1988): "My son does not want to listen to me." She continued: "My son scattered toys around the room." Her responses during the Child-Rearing Style Interview were: Marty said to her son: "You need to pick up your toys!" This was a Level One, Power Assertion, response. Her son yelled: "No!" Then he threw some toys on the floor. Marty responded: "Pick up these toys!" This again was a Level One, Power Assertion, response. Her son started to cry and then yelled at Marty: "No!" At this point Marty reported that she felt very upset with her son and that she had lost control of the situation. Marty again demanded that her son pick up his toys: "Pick up your toys, now!" This is a commanding, demanding, Level One, response. Her son continued to cry and refused to pick up his toys. Marty reported that she did not know how to make him pick up his toys. She walked out of the room and refused

to talk to him. Her son slowly began to pick up some of his toys.

Marty's responses during the Child-Rearing Style Interview were rated Level One, Power Assertion, which is based on threats, commands, demands, belittling, name-calling, and spanking – any negative communication. Examples of Marty's Level One responses were: " You need to pick up your toys!" "Pick up these toys!" "Pick up your toys, now!"

#### Child Rearing Style – Post Intervention

Marty selected the following problem to report during the Child-Rearing Style after she participated in the Best Families program: "My son messed up his room and did not clean it up." She stated that she said to her son: "Your room is messy." This was a Level Three, Simple Explanation, response. Her son did not respond to her remark. "You need to clean it up." This was a Simple Explanation, Level Three, response. "What did I just tell you?" Again, Marty responded with a Level Three response. Her son responded to her: "I want to go to the amusement park with my friends." Marty responded: "Well, IF you clean it up, THEN you can go." Marty responded with a Level Five, problem solving, response. Then Marty suggested: "Let's do it together." Marty again responded with a Level Five, Problem Solving, response. She and her son cleaned his room. Marty then stated: "We got that done." "Now you can go." Her son responded: "Thanks, Mommy."

Marty's responses during the Child-Rearing Style Interview after she participated in the Best Families program were rated Level Four, Induction/Reasoning/ Explanation (including feelings) which is based on telling a child what to

do with a reasonable explanation. Marty began this interaction with a Level One commanding, demanding response: "You need to clean it up!" and moved to a Level Five problem solving strategy of IF-THEN in her next responses: "Well, IF you clean it up, THEN you can go" and "Let's do it together." The result was a Level Four rating which was a change of three levels in a positive direction in her child-rearing style.

#### Observation of Participation During the Parenting Classes

##### Social Problem Solving

Marty selected the following problem to report during the parenting training classes: "My son will not listen to me." During a session of the Best Families program, she elaborated on the situation: "He will not pick up his toys and he knows that he is supposed to put his toys away when he is finished playing with them." Marty role-played this situation with another participant. She role-played the part of the child. The social problem-solving strategy of IF-THEN was used and its effectiveness was discussed. Marty described her feelings during the role-play as: "It wasn't a struggle." She continued: "They also, if you're doing this, and also it appears more communication between a child and a parent, and there's less, you know, - - if they're constantly doing this, it might not be a hundred percent. But at least you're going somewhere, and by the communication, will get closer and closer." Marty suggested that some consequences for guiding children could include: "You could set up a coupon book." Later she agreed with another suggestion to use stickers: "They love stickers."

### Verbal Regulation of Emotion

Marty described her feelings in stressful situations as "Frustrated." "Sometimes I feel that I don't know what to do." "Anger." Marty experienced difficulty verbalizing her feelings and her responses in various situations. She rambled on and on and many times her verbalizations had no context and the information was not relevant to the program. Eventually she began to repeat or mimic others' verbalizations of situations and emotions.

### Affirming Communication

Marty participated in a discussion relating to negative communication and stated: "What about put downs?" She described her frustration with individuals who start with: "You always ..." Marty stated later after further discussion: "I hear sometimes other people say it, but I don't like it. You know, certain gestures, you know, certain things that you know that's putting, you know, belittling your child." "And I don't like it!" Later in the discussion, she said: "You don't do nothing right!"

### Social Support

Marty discussed her frustration with her busy schedule: "My son right now, he is so furious with me because I go to work in the morning, then I come home and then either do work or fix something in the kitchen ..." "I feel so bad because sometimes he's not with me." Marty stated that she has a lot of family support and she gives her family a lot of support. She stated: "Like in my household, we don't have a mother and a father. My Mom, she doesn't work, and I have family members from, you know, my household and will soon be out, but they're constantly -- he has a lot of involvement from his (her son, Richard) family." Marty described the support she

provides to her mother: "Sometimes I take it upon myself to give my Mom a pedicure and, you know, a nice deep pedicure, and just -- I mean just, you know, something to really let her know that, you know, I appreciate everything that she does."

### Summary

Marty's child-rearing style improved by three levels from a Level One, Power Assertion, which is based on threats, commands, demands, belittling, name-calling, and spanking – any negative communication to a Level Four, Induction/ Reasoning/Explanation (including feelings) which is based on telling a child what to do with a reasonable explanation such as: "You won't have any friends if you grab toys." Examples of Marty's Level One responses were: "You need to pick up your toys!" "Pick up these toys!" Examples of her use of a Level Five problem solving strategy of IF-THEN in her next responses were: "Well, IF you clean it up, THEN you can go" and "Let's do it together." The combined score for Marty's child-rearing style resulted in a Level Four rating, which is a positive movement of three levels in her child-rearing style. Marty needed to be mindful at the beginning of her interactions with her son and monitor her responses.

Marty actively participated in the discussions and activities during the Best Families program. Her statements were, many times, rambling and difficult to follow; nevertheless her statements appeared to assist her to begin evaluating the situation and to gain an understanding of her emotions and feelings. She participated in a role-play of the problem she identified with her son and her participation in the role-play appeared to be a turning point for her to gain an understanding of the social problem

solving strategies that were presented. Marty appeared to use this incident as a jumping off point to show the group that she, a teacher's assistant, understood the social problem solving strategies, eagerly implemented them, and was able to assist them in their practice.

### Case 309 Marcie

#### Background Information

Marcie was a 31 year old African American woman. She was the single parent of a five-year-old son, Tavon. Marcie resided in subsidized housing with her son, Tavon, who is enrolled in a participating Head Start Program. Marcie completed nine years of school and was currently unemployed. She was interested in participating in the Best Families program and reported on the Biographical Questionnaire that she had not attended prior parenting training. Marcie scored 7 on the Beck Depression Inventory (Beck, 1972), a score consistent with the absence of depression.

#### Child -Rearing Style – Pre Intervention

Marcie selected the following problem to report during the Child-Rearing Style Interview (Shure, 1998) pre-intervention: "My son refuses to clean up messes he makes." When asked to describe a recent situation, she responded that she said to her son: "Go and clean up the mess you made." This is a Level One, Power Assertion, response. He child responded: "I don't want to." Marcie then said to him: "Go!"

Again, Marcie used a commanding response. Her son answered her command: "No!" Marcie responded: "You better go and clean it up now!" This was a Level One, commanding response. Her son responded: "No!" "I can't." Marcie: "If you don't clean it up, you will get a spanking!" Marcie responded with Level One, threatening response. Her son started to cry and began to clean up his toys. Marcie reported that many times these confrontations result in corporal punishment before her son would do as she requested. Marcie's responses during the Child-Rearing Style Interview pre-intervention were rated Level One, Power Assertion. Marcie's responses were commanding, demanding, or threatening with her son and her son responded in kind.

#### Child-Rearing Style Interview - Post Intervention

Marcie selected the following problem to report during the Child-Rearing Style Interview after she participated in the Best Families program: "My child is stubborn and always wants his own way." She described a recent situation: "Go and pick up the dishes in the room!" This was a Level One, commanding, response. Her son responded: "I don't want to." Marcie: "Mommy needs you to help her." Now, Marcie begins to bring in morality. Child: "Okay." Her son doesn't move. Marcie said: "Do you want Mommy to feel sad?" This again is a response connected to morality, Level Three. Tavon responded: "No." Marcie: "Then will you pick up the dishes?" This again is a Level Three response. She continued: "If you do, then I will buy you a toy when we go to the store." Now Marcie moved to a problem solving, Level Five, response. Her son responded: "Okay" and picked up the dishes as Marcie had requested.

Marcie's responses on the Child-Rearing Style Interview after she participated in the Best Families program were rated Level Three, Simple Explanations with moral overtones (including feelings) that is based on moral reasoning and appealing to her son's feelings. Marcie's Level Three responses were: "Mommy needs you to help her." "Do you want Mommy to feel sad?" These statements appealed to her son's desire to assist or please her. Marcie's Level Five, Problem Solving, response was: "If you do, then I will buy you a toy when we go to the store." In this response she used a social problem strategy, "if-then".

#### Observation of Participation During the Parenting Classes

##### Social Problem Solving

Marcie selected the following problem to report during the parenting training classes: "My son refuses to clean up the messes he makes." Marcie struggled with an accurate identification of the problem that she experienced with her son. This was a difficult activity for her. She wanted to be vague about any problem.

Marcie suggested an alternative behavior when her son does not listen to her and comply with her request would be to "Take his toys away." She further suggested a strategy to reward her son when he complied with her request would be: "You could walk to the store and get some candy." Marcie generated another alternative for managing her son's behavior as suggested in the following statement: "I could send my son to his room."

##### Verbal Regulation of Emotion

Marcie described her feelings as "Helpless" and "I can't eat." when she

encounters problems. Marcie's social problem solving skills have been ineffective in the past as expressed in her statement: "I try not to yell, if I tell him (son) more than two times, that ruins my day." During a discussion of alternatives to lashing out at a person, an alternative behavior would be: "You could walk away." Marcie expressed a need to be able to find time for herself: "... that's a problem I have. It's hard to take time." Marcie experienced difficulty generating ideas and suggestions and she often mimicked other participant's suggestions.

Marcie was able to generate some alternatives for building time into her day for herself: "Early morning, before my son gets up." Generating several alternatives to stressful situations prior to their occurrence would assist her to more appropriately manage her emotions in particular situations that caused her to lose her temper.

She generated the alternative of 'walk away' when we discussed actions one might take during stressful situations which would indicate that although she is not actively problem solving, she is moving away to calm herself.

### Affirming Communication

Marcie participated in a role-play scenario of a problem situation with a Mother having a problem with her child. Marcie played the part of the child.

INSTRUCTOR: Okay, now we will start the role play.

You are the parent (Marty) and Marcie will be the child.

Okay? You could say: 'I get upset when you don't pick up your toys because I am afraid that someone will fall and get hurt.' You need to look at Marcie and tell her.

MARTY: I get upset when you leave your toys all over the floor. I am afraid that someone will fall and get hurt. I want you to pick up your toys when you finish playing with them.

MARCIE: When I leave my toys on the floor, you get upset and you want me to pick them up you want me to keep my toys in my room.

INSTRUCTOR: Very good. We said what you want; now we need to talk about what will happen if he puts his toys away. ‘If you do keep your toys in your room I will take you to the store and get you some chips. If you don’t keep the toys in your room, I will take the TV away.

MARTY: If you keep your toys in your room, I will let you take you to the store and get you a bag of chips, if you do not keep the toys in your room, I will take away the TV.

MARCIE: You want me to keep the toys in my room and if I do you will take me to the store and get me some chips. If I don’t you will take my TV.

INSTRUCTOR: “Which do you want: a bag of chips or to lose your TV?”

MARTY: Do you want to get a bag of chips or lose

your TV?

MARCIE: I want to go to the store and get the chips so

I will keep my toys in my room.

INSTRUCTOR: Very good. How long do you plan to go before you get him a bag of chips? Adults can go for a week but 4 year olds need more immediate reinforcement for acceptable behaviors. They forget to keep doing what you want. So you may want to think of something you will do each day for or with him for at least two weeks, and then you can begin to stretch the time to a longer period. You can give a hug; take a walk, just something to reward his behavior so you can begin to teach him to develop acceptable behaviors. It's nice when somebody hugs you. It feels good.

### Social Support

Marcie appeared to receive adequate support from others. She was also quick to support other participants during class time. One such time was when we were discussing negative advice from others, she agreed with Maria and stated: "Yeah! Yeah!!" On another occasion we were discussing how to request and receive feedback she suggested that one could say: "How do you think I did?"

### Summary

Marcie would best be described as a passive participant during most of the

parenting training classes. Marcie did, however, participate in role-playing scenarios and she also participated in discussions during the class. Throughout the sessions she began to develop strategies and to generate solutions and consequences appropriate for use with her son, which assisted her with an understanding of social problem solving strategies. Her responses during the Child-Rearing Style Interview, after she participated in the program, supported this change in her social problem solving skills and abilities. Some of her responses were: “mommy needs you to help her” and “If you pick up your toys, then I will buy you a toy.”

During the discussion, she expressed feeling ‘helpless’ when she encountered a problem. Marcie suggested an alternative of ‘you could walk away’ as a possible behavior when she becomes angry, which supports her profile of ineffective social problem solving skills and abilities.

Several of Marcie’s responses and suggestions were either vague or mimicked the other participant’s responses. Nevertheless, she did begin to use social problem solving strategies during role-plays during class and as noted in her responses during the Child-Rearing Style Interview post intervention.

### Research Questions

The data and findings for the five research questions will be presented in this section.

## Research Question 1

Did parents' participation in the Best Families program change parents' child-rearing style as measured by Shure's (1998) Child-Rearing Style Interview?

### Child-Rearing Style Rating At Initial Interview

Prior to participation in the Best Families program, each participant completed a Child-Rearing Style Interview. The frequency distribution of participants' Child Rearing Style is presented in Table 2. Twenty-two (73%) of the 30 parents participating in this study received a rating at the lowest two levels on the child-rearing style continuum. Fourteen of the parents were at the lowest level of the Child-Rearing Style continuum (Level One - Power Assertion) and eight were at Level Two - Positive Alternatives. Only 8 of the 30 participants (26.7%) attained the Level 3 - Simple Explanation or Level 4 - Induction/Reasoning/Explanation child rearing style. None of the participants employed the Level 5 - Problem Solving child rearing style. This finding is consistent with the literature that suggests economically disadvantaged parents tend not to use a problem solving approach to child rearing.

Table 2. Pre-Treatment Child Rearing Style

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Power Assertion	14	46.7	46.7	46.7
Positive Alternatives	8	26.7	26.7	73.3
Simple Explanation	6	20.0	20.0	93.3
Induction/Reasoning	2	6.7	6.7	100.0
Total	30	100.0	100.0	

On the other hand, the distribution of child rearing style following participation in the Best Families program shifts in the direction of a Problem Solving child rearing style. Inspection of Table 3 which presents the frequency distribution for the post-treatment child rearing style reveals that only four of the 30 participants (13.3) maintained the lower two levels of child rearing style compared to 73% at the time of the pre-treatment interview. Twenty six (86.7%) of the 30 participants fall in the three higher categories for child rearing style and four (13.3%) of the 30 parents attained the highest level of child rearing style, Problem Solving.

Table 3. Post Treatment Child Rearing Style Frequency Distribution

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Power Assertion	1	3.3	3.3	3.3
Positive Alternatives	3	10.0	10.0	13.3
Simple Explanation	10	33.3	33.3	46.7
Induction/Reasoning	12	40.0	40.0	86.7
Problem Solving	4	13.3	13.3	100.0
Total	30	100.0	100.0	

Table 4 presents the crosstabulation of Pre Treatment Child Rearing Style x Post Treatment Child Rearing Style. Twenty seven of the 30 participants (91.1%) advanced along the child rearing continuum, improving one or more levels. Particularly noteworthy are the 4 parents who began at the lowest level on the child rearing style continuum, Level 1- Power Assertion and progressed to Level 5 - Problem Solving.

Table 4. Pre Child Rearing Style x Post Child Rearing Style Crosstabulation

		Post Child Rearing Style					Total
Child Rearing Style	Power Assertion	Positive Alternatives	Simple Explanation	Induction / Reasoning	Problem Solving		
	Power Assertion Count % of Total	1 3.3%	1 3.3%	4 13.3%	4 13.3%	4 13.3%	14 46.7%
	Positive Alternatives Count % of Total		1 3.3%	3 10.0%	4 13.3%		8 26.7%
	Simple Explanation Count % of Total		1 3.3%	2 6.7%	3 10.0%		6 20.0%
	Induction/ Reasoning Count % of Total			1 3.3%	1 3.3%		2 6.7%
Total	Count % of Total	1 3.3%	3 10.0%	10 33.3%	12 40.0%	4 13.3%	30 100.0%

### Analysis of Variance

The General Linear Model Repeated Measures ANOVA indicated that there was a statistically significant change in the level of child rearing styles in the direction of Problem Solving. The summary table for the Repeated Measures ANOVA for Within-Subjects Effects shows that the effect for time of measurement was statistically significant ( $F (1,29) = 38.07, p < .000$ ).

Table 5. Summary Table of the Within-Subjects Effect Repeated Measures ANOVA for Pre and Post Child-Rearing Style

**Tests of Within-Subjects Effects**

Measure: MEASURE\_1

Source		Type III Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
TIME	Sphericity Assumed	40.017	1	40.017	38.069	.000
	Greenhouse-Geiss	40.017	1.000	40.017	38.069	.000
	Huynh-Feldt	40.017	1.000	40.017	38.069	.000
	Lower-bound	40.017	1.000	40.017	38.069	.000
Error(TIME)	Sphericity Assumed	30.483	29	1.051		
	Greenhouse-Geiss	30.483	29.000	1.051		
	Huynh-Feldt	30.483	29.000	1.051		
	Lower-bound	30.483	29.000	1.051		

It is interesting to note that the formal educational level of the participants was not related significantly to the level of either pre- or post- intervention child-rearing style ratings. The Pearson Product Moment correlation coefficient for Educational Level and Pre-Intervention Child Rearing Style was -.130 (df 28, p=.49). The Pearson Product Moment correlation coefficient for Educational Level and Post-Intervention Child Rearing Style was r = -.092 (df 28, p=.629).

Research Question 2

Did participation in the Best Families program increase positive affirming communication as measured by the Family Problem Solving Communication Index

(FPSC), (McCubbin, M., McCubbin, H., & Thompson, 1988)?

The General Linear Model Repeated Measures ANOVA indicated that there was a statistically significant increase in the level of positive affirming communication. Table 6 presents the summary table for the Repeated Measures ANOVA for Within-Subjects Effects shows that the effect for time of measurement was statistically significant ( $F(1, 29) = 7.54, p < .01$ ).

Table 6. Summary Table of the Within-Subjects Effects for Pre-Post Communication Scores

**Tests of Within-Subjects Effects**

Measure: MEASURE\_1

Source		Type III Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
TIME	Sphericity Assumed	10.417	1	10.417	7.536	.010
	Greenhouse-Geisser	10.417	1.000	10.417	7.536	.010
	Huynh-Feldt	10.417	1.000	10.417	7.536	.010
	Lower-bound	10.417	1.000	10.417	7.536	.010
Error(TIME)	Sphericity Assumed	40.083	29	1.382		
	Greenhouse-Geisser	40.083	29.000	1.382		
	Huynh-Feldt	40.083	29.000	1.382		
	Lower-bound	40.083	29.000	1.382		

Parents' positive affirming communication increased, suggesting that participants may be using more positive affirming language in their communication with their families as measured by the scores on the Family Problem Solving Communication Index.

Table 7 presents the means and standard deviations for Pre and Post Family Problem Solving Communication Index scores.

**Table 7. Means and Standard Deviations for Pre and Post Family Problem Solving Communication Index**

	Mean	Std. Deviation	N
Pre	26.47	3.73	30
Post	27.30	3.01	30

The relationship between parents' educational level and pre and post scores on the Family Problem Solving Communication Index was not significant.

### Research Question 3

Were parents who participated in the Best Families intervention satisfied with the program as measured by the Parent Satisfaction Questionnaire? A three item scale measuring participants' satisfaction with the Best Families program was constructed. Each item was rated on a four point, Likert-type scale. Possible total scores for program satisfaction ranged from 3-12. Cronbach's alpha for the three items was 0.86. The mean satisfaction score was 10.77 and the standard deviation was 1.72. Based on the level of the program satisfaction scores it appears that the participants were extremely satisfied with the program.

In response to the yes/no question, Would you recommend this program to a friend or relative?, all 30 participants (100%) indicated that they would recommend the Best Families program to others.

#### Research Question 4

Was there a change in parents' ratings of their children's behavior at home as measured by the Child Behavior Checklist (Achenbach & Edelbrock, 1983)?

During the initial and follow-up interviews, parents rated their children's behavior at home using the Child Behavior Checklist (CBCL). On the CBCL, scores for externalizing and internalizing scales are calculated separately for boys and girls.

#### Parents' Ratings of Their Sons' Externalizing Behavior

The Repeated Measures Analysis of Variance for parents' ratings of their sons' externalizing behavior showed that the time of measurement effect was statistically significant ( $F(1,18) = 19.76, p < .000$ ). There was a statistically significant decrease in the level of externalizing behaviors for the boys suggesting that their behavioral self-regulation improved. Table 8 presents the summary table for the Repeated Measures ANOVA for the boys' externalizing behavior. Table 9 presents the means and standard deviations for the Child Behavior Checklist pre and post externalizing behavior scores.

Table 7. Summary Table for Within-Subjects Effects for Pre-Post Scores Boys' Externalizing Behaviors on the CBCL

**Tests of Within-Subjects Effects**

Measure: MEASURE\_1

Source		Type III Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
TIME	Sphericity Assumed	252.737	1	252.737	19.757	.000
	Greenhouse-Geisser	252.737	1.000	252.737	19.757	.000
	Huynh-Feldt	252.737	1.000	252.737	19.757	.000
	Lower-bound	252.737	1.000	252.737	19.757	.000
Error(TIME)	Sphericity Assumed	230.263	18	12.792		
	Greenhouse-Geisser	230.263	18.000	12.792		
	Huynh-Feldt	230.263	18.000	12.792		
	Lower-bound	230.263	18.000	12.792		

Table 8. Means and Standard Deviations for Pre and Post Scores for Boys' Externalizing Behaviors on the CBCL

**Descriptive Statistics**

	Mean	Std. Deviation	N
Pre Externalizing	15.74	8.33	19
Post Externalizing	10.58	5.81	19

Parents' Ratings of their Son's Internalizing Behaviors

The Repeated Measures Analysis of Variance for parents' ratings of their sons' internalizing behavior showed that the time of measurement effect was statistically significant ( $F(1,18) = 20.29, p < .000$ ). There was a statistically significant decrease in the level of internalizing behaviors for the boys indicating that perhaps verbal communication had improved. Table 10 presents the summary table for the Repeated Measures ANOVA for the boys' internalizing behavior. Table 11 presents the means and standard deviations for the Child Behavior Checklist pre and post internalizing behavior scores.

Table 9. Summary Table for Within-Subjects Effects for Pre-Post Scores for Boys' Internalizing Behaviors on the CBCL

**Tests of Within-Subjects Effects**

Measure: MEASURE\_1

Source		Type III Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
TIME	Sphericity Assumed	252.737	1	252.737	20.285	.000
	Greenhouse-Geisser	252.737	1.000	252.737	20.285	.000
	Huynh-Feldt	252.737	1.000	252.737	20.285	.000
	Lower-bound	252.737	1.000	252.737	20.285	.000
Error(TIME)	Sphericity Assumed	224.263	18	12.459		
	Greenhouse-Geisser	224.263	18.000	12.459		
	Huynh-Feldt	224.263	18.000	12.459		
	Lower-bound	224.263	18.000	12.459		

Table 10. Means and Standard Deviations for Pre and Post Scores for Boys' Internalizing Behaviors on the CBCL

**Descriptive Statistics**

	Mean	Std. Deviation	N
Achenbach-Internal Scale Boys	11.68	7.26	19
Posttest Achenbach Internal Score - Boys	6.53	3.27	19

Parents' Ratings of their Daughters Externalizing Behaviors

The Repeated Measures Analysis of Variance for parents' ratings of their daughters' externalizing behavior showed that the time of measurement effect was statistically significant ( $F(1,10) = 8.41, p < .016$ ). There was a statistically significant decrease in the level of externalizing behaviors for the girls suggesting that their behavioral self-regulation improved. Table 12 presents the summary table for the Repeated Measures ANOVA for the girls' externalizing behavior. Table 13 presents the means and standard deviations for the Child Behavior Checklist pre and post externalizing behavior scores for the girls.

Table 11. Summary Table for Within-Subjects Effects for Pre-Post Scores for Girls' Externalizing Behaviors on the CBCL

**Tests of Within-Subjects Effects**

Measure: MEASURE\_1

Source		Type III Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
TIME	Sphericity Assumed	142.545	1	142.545	8.412	.016
	Greenhouse-Geisser	142.545	1.000	142.545	8.412	.016
	Huynh-Feldt	142.545	1.000	142.545	8.412	.016
	Lower-bound	142.545	1.000	142.545	8.412	.016
Error(TIME)	Sphericity Assumed	169.455	10	16.945		
	Greenhouse-Geisser	169.455	10.000	16.945		
	Huynh-Feldt	169.455	10.000	16.945		
	Lower-bound	169.455	10.000	16.945		

Table 12. Means and Standard Deviations for Pre and Post Scores for Girls' Externalizing Behaviors on the CBCL

**Descriptive Statistics**

	Mean	Std. Deviation	N
Pre Externalizing	13.55	8.76	11
Post Externalizing	8.45	4.78	11

Parent's Ratings of Their Daughter's Internalizing Behaviors

The Repeated Measures Analysis of Variance for parents' ratings of their daughters' internalizing behavior showed that the time of measurement effect was statistically significant ( $F(1,10) = 11.86, p < .006$ ). There was a statistically significant decrease in the level of internalizing behaviors for the girls indicating that perhaps verbal communication had improved. Table 14 presents the summary table for the Repeated Measures ANOVA for the girls' internalizing behavior. Table 15 presents the means and standard deviations for the Child Behavior Checklist pre and

post internalizing behavior scores for girls.

Table 13. Summary Table for Within-Subjects Effects for Pre-Post Scores for Girls' Internalizing Behavior on the CBCL

Tests of Within-Subjects Effects						
Measure: MEASURE_1						
Source		Type III Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
TIME	Sphericity Assumed	262.545	1	262.545	11.856	.006
	Greenhouse-Geisser	262.545	1.000	262.545	11.856	.006
	Huynh-Feldt	262.545	1.000	262.545	11.856	.006
	Lower-bound	262.545	1.000	262.545	11.856	.006
Error(TIME)	Sphericity Assumed	221.455	10	22.145		
	Greenhouse-Geisser	221.455	10.000	22.145		
	Huynh-Feldt	221.455	10.000	22.145		
	Lower-bound	221.455	10.000	22.145		

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Table 14. Means and Standard Deviations for Pre and Post Girls' Internalizing Behavior on the CBCL

#### Descriptive Statistics

	Mean	Std. Deviation	N
Pretest Internalizing	13.91	8.95	11
Posttest Internalizing	7.00	4.47	11

#### Research Question 5

Did teacher's ratings of children's behavior in school as measured by the Teacher Report Form (Achenbach & Edelbrock, 1986) change after their respective parents' participated in the Best Families program?

In addition to parents' ratings of children's behavior at home, the Head Start teachers rated children's behavior in the classroom using the Teacher Report Form, (TRF), of the Child Behavior Checklist. Pre and Post scores were obtained for the Externalizing and Internalizing Scales, which are reported separately for boys and

girls.

#### Teacher Rating of Boys' Externalizing Behavior

The Repeated Measures Analysis of Variance for teachers' ratings of the boys' externalizing behavior showed that the time of measurement effect was statistically significant ( $F(1,18) = 6.36$ ,  $p < .021$ ). There was a statistically significant decrease in the level of externalizing behaviors for the boys suggesting that their behavioral self-regulation improved. Table 16 presents the summary table for the Repeated Measures ANOVA for the boys' externalizing behavior. Table 17 presents the means and standard deviations for the Teacher Report Form pre and post externalizing behavior scores.

Table 15. Summary Table for Within-Subjects Effects for Pre-Post Teachers' Ratings of Boys' Externalizing Behaviors

#### **Tests of Within-Subjects Effects**

Measure: MEASURE\_1

Source		Type III Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
TIME	Sphericity Assumed	152.000	1	152.000	6.363	.021
	Greenhouse-Geisser	152.000	1.000	152.000	6.363	.021
	Huynh-Feldt	152.000	1.000	152.000	6.363	.021
	Lower-bound	152.000	1.000	152.000	6.363	.021
Error(TIME)	Sphericity Assumed	430.000	18	23.889		
	Greenhouse-Geisser	430.000	18.000	23.889		
	Huynh-Feldt	430.000	18.000	23.889		
	Lower-bound	430.000	18.000	23.889		

**Table 16. Means and Standard Deviations for Pre and Post Teacher Ratings of Boys Externalizing Behaviors**

<b>Descriptive Statistics</b>			
	Mean	Std. Deviation	N
Teacher Report Form Externalizing Score, Boys	20.26	12.16	19
Post Teacher Report Form Externalizing Score, Boys	16.26	8.79	19

**Teachers' Ratings of Boys' Internalizing Behavior**

The Repeated Measures Analysis of Variance for teachers' ratings of the boys' internalizing behavior showed that the time of measurement effect was statistically significant ( $F(1,18) = 10.54, p < .004$ ). There was a statistically significant decrease in the level of internalizing behaviors for the boys indicating that perhaps verbal communication had improved. Table 18 presents the summary table for the Repeated Measures ANOVA for the boys' internalizing behavior. Table 19 presents the means and standard deviations for the Teacher Rating Form pre and post internalizing behavior scores.

Table 17. Summary Table for Within-Subjects Effects for Pre-Post Teacher Ratings of Boys' Internalizing Behavior

**Tests of Within-Subjects Effects**

Measure: MEASURE\_1

Source		Type III Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
TIME	Sphericity Assumed	25.289	1	25.289	10.535	.004
	Greenhouse-Geisser	25.289	1.000	25.289	10.535	.004
	Huynh-Feldt	25.289	1.000	25.289	10.535	.004
	Lower-bound	25.289	1.000	25.289	10.535	.004
Error(TIME)	Sphericity Assumed	43.211	18	2.401		
	Greenhouse-Geisser	43.211	18.000	2.401		
	Huynh-Feldt	43.211	18.000	2.401		
	Lower-bound	43.211	18.000	2.401		

Table 18. Means and Standard Deviations for Pre and Post Teachers' Ratings of Boys Internalizing Behavior

**Descriptive Statistics**

	Mean	Std. Deviation	N
Teacher Report Form Internal Score, Boys	4.00	4.01	19
Post Teacher Report Form Total Internal Score, Boys	2.37	2.31	19

Teacher Ratings of Girls' Externalizing Behavior

The Repeated Measures Analysis of Variance for teachers' ratings of the girls' externalizing behavior showed that the time of measurement effect was statistically significant ( $F(1,10) = 6.93, p < .025$ ). There was a statistically significant decrease in the level of externalizing behaviors for the girls suggesting that their behavioral self-regulation improved. Table 20 presents the summary table for the Repeated Measures ANOVA for the girls' externalizing behavior. Table 21 presents the means and

standard deviations for the Teacher Report Form pre and post externalizing behavior scores for the girls

**Table 19. Summary Table for Within-Subjects Effects for Pre-Post Teacher Ratings of Girls' Externalizing Behaviors**

**Tests of Within-Subjects Effects**

Measure: MEASURE\_1

Source		Type III Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
TIME	Sphericity Assumed	269.500	1	269.500	6.928	.025
	Greenhouse-Geisser	269.500	1.000	269.500	6.928	.025
	Huynh-Feldt	269.500	1.000	269.500	6.928	.025
	Lower-bound	269.500	1.000	269.500	6.928	.025
Error(TIME)	Sphericity Assumed	389.000	10	38.900		
	Greenhouse-Geisser	389.000	10.000	38.900		
	Huynh-Feldt	389.000	10.000	38.900		
	Lower-bound	389.000	10.000	38.900		

**Table 20. Means and Standard Deviations for Pre and Post Teacher Ratings of Girls' Externalizing Behaviors**

**Descriptive Statistics**

	Mean	Std. Deviation	N
Pretest Teacher Reported Externalizing	23.18	14.04	11
Posttest Teacher Reported Externalizing	16.18	9.55	11

**Teacher Ratings of Girls' Internalizing Behavior Pre-Intervention**

The Repeated Measures Analysis of Variance for teachers' ratings of the girls' internalizing behavior showed that the time of measurement effect was not statistically significant ( $F(1,18) = 3.97, p < .07$ ). Table 22 presents the summary table for the Repeated Measures ANOVA for the girls' internalizing behavior. Table 23 presents the means and standard deviations for pre and post teachers' ratings of internalizing behaviors. Inspection of Table 23 indicates that the frequency of girls'

internalizing behaviors is extremely low for both pre - post test scores. It is possible that due to a "floor effect" that a difference cannot be detected.

Table 21. Summary Table for Within-Subjects Effects for Pre and Post Teacher Ratings of Girls' Internalizing Behaviors

**Tests of Within-Subjects Effects**

Measure: MEASURE\_1

Source		Type III Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
TIME	Sphericity Assumed	4.545	1	4.545	3.968	.074
	Greenhouse-Geisser	4.545	1.000	4.545	3.968	.074
	Huynh-Feldt	4.545	1.000	4.545	3.968	.074
	Lower-bound	4.545	1.000	4.545	3.968	.074
Error(TIME)	Sphericity Assumed	11.455	10	1.145		
	Greenhouse-Geisser	11.455	10.000	1.145		
	Huynh-Feldt	11.455	10.000	1.145		
	Lower-bound	11.455	10.000	1.145		

Table 22. Means and Standard Deviations for Pre and Post Teacher Ratings of Girls' Internalizing Behaviors

**Descriptive Statistics**

	Mean	Std. Deviation	N
Teacher Report Form Internalizing Score, Girls	4.18	3.57	11
Post Teacher Report Form Internalizing Score, Girls	3.27	2.80	11

## Chapter 5

### Discussion

This chapter will discuss the research findings and the implications of these findings for parenting education programs. It will also discuss theoretical contributions of the study, methodological issues from the study, future research, policy recommendations for Head Start programs, limitations of the study, and draw some conclusions.

### Research Questions Review and Findings

#### Research Question 1

Did participation in the Best Families program affect the level of the parents' child-rearing style as measured by Shure's (1998) Child-Rearing Style Interview?

The participants in this study were volunteer parents whose children were enrolled in a mid-Atlantic state Head Start program during summer 2001. The participating Head Start Centers served 79 English-speaking parents who composed the pool of eligible participants for this study. Of the 53 parents who pre-registered for this study, 30 volunteer parents completed the study, 15 parents did not attend the scheduled initial interview and eight parents dropped out of the study during or shortly after the initial interviews in the spring, 2001.

All of the volunteer parents shared similar socio-economic status, all were English speaking, and all reported that they never had participated in parenting

education training with a problem solving focus. None of the volunteer participants were considered moderately or severely clinically depressed according to the screening criteria. (Beck Depression Inventory (Beck, 1972).

Consistent with the literature, this study found that most economically disadvantaged parents adopt an authoritarian style of child-rearing (Baumrind, 1991), and their disciplinary strategies tend to be more punitive (Chase-Lansdale, Brooks-Gunn, & Zamsky, 1994). At the time of the initial interview, 22 of the 30 volunteer parents were in the lowest two levels on the child-rearing style continuum. Fourteen of the parents were at the lowest level of the child-rearing style continuum, Level One-Power Assertion, and eight were at Level Two-Positive Alternatives. These findings were consistent with the literature that suggests that many economically disadvantaged parents experienced negative parental attitudes, harsh parenting styles, and little parental support, when they were children and they, in turn, have adopted these styles as their own parenting practices (Simons, Whitbeck, Conger, & Chyi-In, 1991)

It is important to note that not all economically disadvantaged parents adopt more authoritarian child-rearing styles as described in Shure's (1998) Level One and Level Two Child-Rearing Styles. At the time of the pre-intervention interview, six of the 30 volunteer parents received a rating of Level Three Child-Rearing Style-Simple Explanations with Moral Overtones and two of the parents received a rating of Level Four Child-Rearing Style-Induction/Reasoning/Explanation.

The increase in the Level of the parents' child-rearing style after participation in the Best Families program was statistically significant ( $F\ 1, 29 = 38.07$ ;  $p < .000$ ).

The Levels of child-rearing style achieved were associated with the incorporation of strategies reflecting more of a problem solving style. Twenty three (73%) of the 30 parent participants moved to a higher level on the child-rearing style continuum, five participants remained at the same Level, and one parent decreased one Level.

Moreover, even parents who initially fell into the lowest Level One Child-Rearing Style, Power Assertion reported positive changes in their interactions with their children. Four of the parents who began the study at the Level One Child-Rearing Style achieved a rating of Level Five Child-Rearing Style, Problem Solving, after participation in the Best Families program. Four of the parents who began the study with a rating of Level One Child-Rearing Style achieved a rating of Level Four Child-Rearing Style, Induction/Reasoning/Explanation. One parent moved from Level One to Level Two and one parent stayed at Level One.

It has been stated that because low-income parents are “multiple entrapped” (Wahler & Barnes, 1988) they are unlikely to attend parent training sessions and tend to have high recidivism rates. This study provides evidence to the contrary. Consistent with expectations certain features of the design of the Best Families program resulted in a higher level of parental engagement. Possible contributing factors may be that the program was community based, it was offered through the Head Start program that was accessible to economically disadvantaged parents, and was delivered in an interactive experiential format in which parents supported each other. These findings are consistent with the literature that different parents are reached by different approaches to the same problems in child-rearing and are influenced by different points of view (Weeks, 1914; Halpern, 1990; &

Bronfenbrenner, 1990).

Consistent with program expectations parents regularly attended multiple sessions of the Best Families program. Each session of the Best Families program built on the strategies and concepts taught in previous sessions. Participants were given tasks to perform at home between sessions. Group members were excited to share the results of the implementation of such tasks and hear the experiences of other group members. Moreover, the group members participated in a ‘buddy system’ that was used to maintain contact and provide encouragement to each other during the program.

Many current parenting education programs are designed as two-hour lectures delivered by professionals such as proposed by Elias (1999) and Shure (1995) and provide a text and a workbook. These programs use an educational model. Although these tools may be a necessary part of some learning strategies, they are not sufficient for implementation by with limited formal education. Parenting education is readily available to affluent consumers, who can exercise choice about the information they purchase. Low-income parents have far more limited resources and less discretionary income to purchase information (Kagan, 1996). Many parent training models have been developed for divorced parents, domestic violence, substance abuse and other clinical populations.

The Best Families program employed multiple concepts that consisted of social problem solving strategies and skills, positive communication, and social support and was based on a relationship model. An experiential component was developed to assist participants to practice strategies and participate in guided

reflection in a safe environment with the support of the group. The Best Families program was presented free of charge and located in a familiar environment, the local Head Start building. Participants were given time and coaching to practice strategies in the classroom and were provided with written materials to assist them when they implemented strategies at home. Parent training programs can result in parents gaining the knowledge, control and competence they need to cope effectively with the stresses of parenting under conditions of poverty (Webster-Stratton, 1998).

The results indicated that some parents benefited more from the program than others. A review of the individual case studies provided valuable information about these individual differences. The individuals who were most engaged in the process appeared to derive the greatest benefit from the program.

Parent involvement included class participation, implementation of program strategies with their child, sharing their experiences of implementation of different strategies to the group, and guided reflection. The case studies reflect the various levels of involvement and participation in one group which is reflective the remaining groups.

Formal education did not appear to have any effect on pre-intervention child-rearing style. Two individuals began the program with a Level Four Child-Rearing Style, one of the two had a high school diploma and the other individual had less than a high school education. One participant had an Associate Degree and she began the program with a Level One Child-Rearing Style. Nine participants had less than high school education. Five of the nine participants were at Level One, two participants were at Level Two, one participant was at Level Three, and one was at Level Four

Child-Rearing Style. Two participants had a General Equivalency Diploma. One of the two was at a Level One, and one was at a Level Three Child-Rearing Style. Eighteen participants had a high school diploma. Eight of the 12 were at Level One, six of the 12 were at Level Two, three participants were at Level Three and one was at Level Four Child-Rearing Style. One individual had an Associate Degree and began to program at a Level One Child-Rearing Style.

After participation in the Best Families program, the change in parent's child-rearing styles as measured by the ratings on the Child-Rearing Style Interview (Shure, 1998) was statistically significant ( $F(1,29) = 38.07, p < .000$ ). These findings are consistent with Wood & Baker's (1999) study that reported that parents are interested in parenting programs and their participation, or lack of it, may be influenced by various pragmatic and attitudinal factors. The multi-method model of a community approach, developed for the Best Families program, encouraged and motivated participants to attend every session through the buddy system that began during the first session. The program was presented free of charge (Kagan, 1996), it was located in a familiar environment (Wood & Baker (1999), the participants engaged in assisted practice (Berk & Winsler, 1995), and they were provided with written materials to assist them to implement the strategies at home. Guided reflection with assisted practice enabled participants to evaluate their progress and obstacles in a comprehensive fashion.

The literature that suggests that many economically disadvantaged parents adopt their parent's child-rearing styles as their own (Simons, Whitbeck, Conger, & Chyi-In, 1991). The effectiveness of participation in the Best Families program may

have a generational influence on future parents to adopt a different child-rearing style.

Research Question 2.

Did participation in the Best Families program increase affirming communication as measured by the Family Problem Solving Communication Index (FPSC), (McCubbin, M., McCubbin, H., & Thompson, 1988)?

Best Families program addressed affirming communication in a multi-model fashion. Amato & Ochiltree (1986) in their summary of research found that a variety of parental behaviors were associated with child competence, one of which was positive communication skills. Lectures, instructor demonstrations of negative and affirming communication styles, group exercises, modeling effective communication strategies, facilitating role-plays, group discussions, assisted practice, feedback, reinforcement, and guided reflection were the methods employed to teach communication strategies. Not only was it important to practice the strategies that were presented in the program, in the Vygotskian (1978) sense, it was also important to participate in assisted discovery. The social climate was comfortable and was reinforced in each session. In addition the Best Families program included strategies of responsive teaching, assisted practice, and guided reflection (Berk & Winsler, 1995). Parents were also given tasks to perform at home to further assist them with the implementation of the program with their families (see Appendix C)

The increase in the scores on the FPSC Affirming Scale, after parents participated in the Best Families program, was statistically significant ( $F (1,29) = 7.54$ ;  $p < .01$ ). McCubbin, M., McCubbin, H., & Thompson's (1996) research of

single parent families reported a Mean of 10.81, SD of 3.04 and a Range of 15. In her study (1988) of mothers of chronically ill children reported a Mean was 11.879, SD of 2.36, and a Range of 9. The Best Families study of child-rearing style reported a Mean of 11.467, SD of 3.73, and Range of 14. When comparing the statistical data of the Best Families program to McCubbin's studies, the statistics suggest that parents living under stressful conditions share similar communication styles.

These short-term findings suggest that the Best Families program was successful in its objective of improving economically disadvantaged parents affirming communication and child-rearing styles. For those families with more than one child, the generalizability of the program would extend to the other children in the family.

An example of one participant sharing her feelings of frustration when managing her child in a problematic situation was as follows: "You start listening to yourself, and start saying things you don't follow-up on and eventually you feel bad about yourself and you just want to go hug your dog." The authoritarian or power assertion child-rearing style, identified as the parent is boss, produces children who suffer from low self-esteem (Baumrind, 1967, & Shure 1994). Parents build the groundwork for a child's positive feelings about himself and set the stage for the child to develop capacities for effective interaction with the world of people and things." (McLoyd, 1990). After watching a role-play of a vignette using a suggested alternative to a problem situation was completed, Kelly reported that she experienced positive feelings about using the program strategies. Some of her comments were: "Like it (the strategy) would work. She (the mother in the vignette) was nice." Kelly began to develop an awareness of her communication style and its effect on her child

following a period of guided reflection.

### Research Question 3

Were parents who participated in the Best Families intervention satisfied with the program as measured by the Parent Satisfaction Questionnaire?

Parent satisfaction with the Best Families program was high, with 66 % of the participants reporting that the program was very helpful with their personal relationships and 20% reported that it was moderately helpful. In addition, 53% of the participants reported that the program was very helpful in managing conflicts with their children, and an additional 40% reported that it was moderately helpful. Eighty three percent of the participants reported that the program would be very helpful in managing future interpersonal conflicts and an additional ten percent reported that it would be moderately helpful in the future. All participants (100 %) reported they would recommend the Best Families program to others.

Several participants expressed disappointment when the program ended and asked if there were some way the program could continue. They reported that they felt that they were developing the ability to evaluate and to analyze their communication and child-rearing styles in a meaningful manner in the safety of the group and they expressed the desire to continue their progress.

Parent's anticipated needs were met throughout the program. Transportation was available to parents as needed, baby sitting was available to participant's children, meals were provided, the location was in the participants' community, a non-threatening environment was established, and the program was complimentary. This

attention given to participant's basic needs may have been a contributing factor to receptivity to the program.

#### Research Question 4

Was there a change in parents' ratings of their children's behavior at home as measured by the Child Behavior Checklist (CBCL), (Achenbach & Edelbrock, 1983)?

Thirty volunteer parents of children who were enrolled in the Head Start program participated in this study. These participants rated their children's' behavior, 19 (63%) boys and 11 (37%) girls, using the CBCL. According to the 2000 U.S. Census of Delaware's population aged five or under, 51% were boys and 48.9% were girls. It is important to note since 63% of the target were boys and 37% were girls. This study consisted of approximately twice as many parents of boys who sought help as compared to parents of girls.

Children in the Head Start population are at higher than average risk for developing behavior problems because the risk factors such as low income, low education, single parenthood, etc. are present at higher than average rates in the economically disadvantaged families (McLoyd, 1990). In addition to parent and family risk factors, child risk factors have been implicated in child behavior disorders. Studies indicate that poor social skills and poor problem solving (Asarnov & Callan, 1985; Richard & Dodge, 1982; Rubin & Krasnor, 1986) are associated with behavior problems. Research associated with Head Start programs in the past has emphasized the impact of the programs on children's cognitive development and academic readiness. This study focused on the impact of child-rearing style on child behavior.

Head Start's founding philosophy is based on strong parental involvement in day-to-day operations of the program (Zigler & Styfco, 1993). Parent involvement has been a critical theme in Head Start since its establishment in 1965. It is prominently displayed in the Head Start performance standards which mandate to partner with families and the community to enable, empower, and support families' efforts to enhance their children's development competencies. Few studies have examined the impact of such involvement on parents, and subsequently their children. Little is known if parent involvement in the program can prevent or reduce children's aggressive and anti-social behaviors or strengthen their social skills. Additionally, there appears to be little research on Head Start's effort to promote parenting skills and to strengthen parent mutual support networks (Webster-Stratton, 1998).

Data analysis of this study indicated that parent ratings of their sons' externalizing behaviors changed by 78% and parent ratings of girls' externalizing behaviors changed by 72%. This analysis indicated that parents rated 75% of their children's externalizing behaviors as improved at a statistically significant level. The data suggest that parent participation in the Best Families program was effective in changing parents' ratings of their children's aggressive, anti-social, and impulsive behaviors.

Baumrind (1967) suggested that children reared in homes where authoritarian or power assertion child-rearing styles were used were likely to be distrustful and withdrawn. The data indicated a change in parent ratings of their sons' internalizing behaviors by 73% and by 90% for the girls. Data analysis indicated that parents rated a change in 81% of their children which was statistically significant. The data suggest

that parent participation in the Best Families program was effective in reducing their children's inhibited, withdrawn, and fearful type behaviors by 81%. The data reflected that parents' child-rearing style changed and parent ratings of their children's behavior improved.

The impact of parent participation in the Best Families program was statistically significant. A primary goal of the Best Families program was to assist parents to prepare their children to participate successfully as citizens in the wider society. Several studies (Baumrind, 1967, 1971, 1989 & 1991; Patterson, 1976; & Lazerele & Patterson, 1994) have identified that there is a relationship between parenting style and child development and behavior. An exclusive mandate of the Head Start is to enhance children's developmental competencies to prepare them to succeed in their present environments and with later responsibilities in school and life (Gadsden, 2003).

Research shows that when services such as parent education and support are offered to families, outcomes for children, siblings, and families improve (Robert & Wasik, 1990; Seitz & Apfel, 1994). Participation in the Best Families program confirms these findings.

### Research Question 5

Was there a change in teacher's ratings of the children's behavior in school as measured by the Teacher Report Form (TRF) (Achenbach & Edelbrock, 1986) after their respective parents' participated in the Best Families program?

Parent involvement is an essential factor to the academic success of their child. Making a difference in the lives of children ultimately means helping them succeed in school (Shanok, 2003). Shanok identified seven competencies as critical to learning in school: a) relatedness, b) communication skills, c) cooperativeness, and d) confidence, e) curiosity, f) intentionality and g) self-control. Additionally the Perry High/Scope Curriculum has been parent involvement (Weikert & Schweinhart, 1997). This program was constructed so that children could have a sense of control over themselves and their environment. This program has been successful in its efforts to provide a high quality program that has a long term positive effect on children's lives (Weikert & Schweinhart, 1997). Conversely, the Best Families program provided parents with a problem-solving approach to child-rearing that enabled the parents to develop a sense of control over themselves and their environment and to transfer these strategies and skills to their children. A sense of control over one's self and one's environment can only be achieved when an individual is permitted to identify needs or problems, generate solutions and engage in guided reflection. The Best Families program provided this structure.

An exclusive mandate of the Head Start is to enhance children's developmental competencies to prepare them to succeed in their present environments and with later responsibilities in school and life (Gadsden, 2003). The change in teacher's ratings of the boys and girls externalizing behavior in school as measured by the Teacher Report Form TRF (Achenbach & Edelbrock, 1986) Externalizing Scale after their respective parents' participated in the Best Families program was statistically significant.

Students who display impulsive, aggressive behaviors think more about "now" without consideration for their own or others' feelings, for the consequences of their acts, or for different ways to solve a problem (Shure, 1997). Durlak and Wells (1997) meta analysis of prevention programs for children indicated that problem-solving programs were quite successful with children aged two to seven years in an academic environment. Data analysis of the Best Families program indicated that when parents participated in the program, teacher ratings of their sons' externalizing behaviors changed by 94% and teacher ratings of their daughters' externalizing behaviors changed by 100%. The analysis of the data indicated that teachers rated 97% of their students' externalizing behaviors as improved at a statistically significant level. The data suggest that parent participation in the Best Families program was effective in changing teacher' ratings of their children's aggressive, anti-social, and impulsive behaviors.

Deficits in social problem solving skills were related to poor adjustment in elementary school children aged six to eight years (Webster-Stratton, 1993). Dubow & Tisak (1989) found that grade point averages of third through fifth grade students were directly related to teacher's ratings of third through fifth grade students' behavioral adjustment and social problem solving skills.

The change in teacher's ratings of the boys internalizing behavior in school as measured by the TRF Internalizing Scale after their respective parents' participated in the Best Families program was statistically significant. However, teacher ratings of girls' internalizing behavior were not significant.

The data indicated a change in teacher ratings of boys' internalizing behaviors by 21% was statistically significant. The data indicated a change in teacher ratings of girls' internalizing behaviors by 5% was not significant. It is important to note that analysis of the data indicated that the initial teacher ratings of children's internalizing behaviors was minimal. Therefore, teacher ratings of children's internalizing behaviors had a narrow range for improvement. It needs to be noted that most pre-school children exhibit more externalizing than internalizing behaviors which gets teacher attention. The data suggest that parent participation in the Best Families program was effective in reducing teachers' ratings of boys inhibited, withdrawn, and fearful type behaviors by 21%. The data reflected that teacher ratings of students internalizing behaviors changed after parents participated in the Best Families program.

The data suggest that parents of children who exhibit aggressive behaviors volunteered for the program. Also, teachers may have been more concerned about children's externalizing behaviors which impacted the classroom more than internalizing behaviors that normally go unnoticed or are seen as positive qualities behaviors in the classroom.

The data suggest that teacher ratings of children's behaviors changed in a positive direction. Teachers were generally pleased with the positive changes in their students' classroom behaviors. The impact of parent participation in the Best Families program was statistically significant in changing teacher ratings of their children's behavior.

### Theoretical Contributions

Best Families was a four-part program designed specifically for economically disadvantaged parents of 4 - 5 year old children enrolled in Head Start programs in a mid-Atlantic state. Best Families program sought to assist low-income parents to develop an understanding of their child's behavior and to facilitate positive change in their child-rearing style.

Current parenting education programs are designed as two-hour lectures delivered by professionals such as Elias (1999) and Shure (1995) who often provide a text and a workbook with the expectation that parents will then follow through with the suggested strategies and instructions. Many parenting programs are developed to address issues of domestic violence, divorce, and others have been developed for clinical populations (Webster-Stratton, 1993; Greenspan & Wieder, 1998, 1995; Barkley, 1987; & Forehand & McMahon, 1981). These and other parenting education programs are readily available to affluent consumers, who can exercise choice about the information they purchase. Low-income parents have far more limited resources and less discretionary income to purchase information (Kagan, 1996). Many of these parents are simply not able to translate written information and formal lectures into useful implementation.

A possible reason that many programs are ineffective is that they begin with an academic mind set. Many theorists think that one can educate the mind apart from the emotions. According to Thompson (2003) Part of what opens up the mind as a catalyst for learning are relationships or human connections. These connections provide the bridge or gateway that individuals may use to pursue various areas of

development.

The Best Families program was a complex parenting education program that was developed specifically for economically disadvantaged parents. The Best Families program was an experiential model based on a synthesis of Shure's (1992) I Can Problem Solve Program, Elias, Tobias, & Friedman (1999) Emotionally Intelligent Parenting, and Goleman's (1995) book, Emotional Intelligence. Shure's I Can Problem to Solve (1992) and Raising a Thinking Child (1995) programs are excellent programs for teachers and parents to teach children how to problem solve, however, they did not meet the needs of the target population. Much of the research for these programs was completed in a school setting that usually did not include economically disadvantaged parents. Wood & Baker (1999) found that although most parents expressed an interest in parent education events, economically disadvantaged parents were less likely to attend the events when held at the school. Goleman's (1995) theory of emotional intelligence provided the basis for some program materials that assisted participants to explore and evaluate their emotional responses. Many economically disadvantaged parents have low levels of formal education and are simply not able to translate written information and formal lectures into useful practices.

The Best Families program adapted Shure's (1992, 1995), Elias, et al., (1999), and Goleman's constructs to fit the target population. This adaptation was accomplished through the use of hands on, interactive, multiple sessions. Long term, multiple sessions were developed for participants to implement and evaluate strategies and to reflect on their success. This program is in stark contrast to many

parenting programs that offer lectures in a one-hour format. The social climate in the program was comfortable and reinforced by the researcher in each session. In addition the Best Families program included strategies of responsive teaching, assisted practice, and guided reflection. Self-assessment, modeling, role-playing, practice, feedback, reinforcement, and guided reflection were the methods used to provide parents with alternative child-rearing strategies for implementation for use in their daily lives. Not only was it important to practice the strategies that were presented, in the Vygotskian (1978) sense it was also important to participate in assisted discovery through guided reflection. The Vygotskian view that learning leads development (Berk & Winsler, 1995) provided the basis for the theoretical approach employed in the Best Families program.

### Methodology

The Best Families program used a multi-method approach that was based on Vygotsky's (1978) theory that learning leads development and that the relationship of an individual with a partner to assist with the practice of various strategies enhanced the individual's learning experience. Vygotsky (1978) proposed that learning occurs in this fashion and referred to it as the zone of proximal development. "The individual actively explores, tries out alternatives, and orients to the partner for help, while the partner guides and structures the individual's activity, scaffolding the individual's efforts to extend current skills to a higher level of competence" (Berk & Winsler, 1995). Lectures, instructor demonstrations of negative and positive communication styles, group exercises, modeling effective communication strategies,

facilitating role-plays, group discussions, and guided reflection were used to teach the content of each of the four training Modules. The Best Families program offered an experiential model for use by economically disadvantaged parents who expressed difficulty with the implementation of the child-rearing strategies and suggestions offered in some of the parenting programs they had attended in the past. This existential approach appeared to be effective in assisting the participants with the implementation of this program.

The Best Families program was delivered over a four-week period. Participants were encouraged and motivated to attend every session through the use of several strategies. A buddy system was started during the first session that provided group support between sessions. The Best Families program was presented free of charge and located in a familiar environment, the local Head Start building. Wood & Baker (1999) suggested that community education may be more effective for economically disadvantaged families. Participants were given time and coaching to practice strategies during the sessions and were provided with written materials to assist them in the implementation of the strategies at home. Guided reflection with assisted practice enabled participants to evaluate their progress and needs in a comprehensive fashion. Pre-post instruments, case studies, and reflective analysis of the sessions were used to evaluate the efficacy of the Best Families program.

### Limitations

The following limitations existed with regard to the study:

1. This study was limited to volunteer parents of children enrolled in a Mid-Atlantic Head Start program during the summer of 2001.
2. Time was a factor in that this study was completed during the summer session of the Head Start Agency and that limited the number of parents who were available to volunteer for the study.
3. Limitations are inherent whenever respondents are asked for their perceptions about a given subject. For example each individual brings to any given situation prejudices, attitudes, and response sets that can affect the results of the study. Yet the self-report technique provides information that may not be attainable by other methods.
4. The time limitations of the study, four weeks, made it very difficult to accomplish comprehensive goals.
5. This study considered short term effects of the program; however, long term effects that address the persistence of change over time were not addressed.
6. Moreover, the individual who presented this parenting education intervention program had been involved with the Head Start community for 15 years as a Mental Health Consultant. She is well known in this community as someone who can be trusted. Therefore, parents appeared to be comfortable to disclose sensitive and personal information about parent-child relationships. In addition to delivering the parent education intervention program, the researcher was available to parent participants for personal counseling. Further research would need to address whether the positive effects of the Best Families intervention would be obtained if the program

were delivered by an individual who had not established a long term trusting relationship with Head Start parents would have the same positive effect.

### Recommendations for Future Research

The results of this study suggest the need for additional research. The statistical data suggest that most parents want additional training and, although the program was short as compared to the academic school year, positive results were evidenced in 26 of the 30 participants. The following are additional areas of research that could be explored:

1. A larger sampling of parents could be reached by providing a program during the regular school calendar year.
2. Future programs should be broadened and lengthened in order to provide a more comprehensive program.
3. The study could be broadened to reach a larger population by training trainers to teach the program to various populations.
4. The study could be broadened to include teachers, who would be trained concurrently with parents, so that uniform strategies could be used in school and at home with the children.
5. Children could be trained concurrently with the parents which might effect a better outcome.

### Policy Recommendations - Early Childhood Intervention

Parenting education is a mandatory component of Head Start programs.

Typically parenting education consists of lectures by expert with little, if any, participant involvement. These lectures are frequently poorly attended and not evaluated as is evidenced by attendance sheet sign-ins.

The Best Families program presented a series of sessions with instructions to implement specific strategies, to evaluate the efficacy of the parenting approach, and for guided reflection. Parenting education programs must be more intensive and incorporate experiential components, formal evaluation of the intervention, and attention both to changes in parent and child. Parent involvement is complex and parenting education programs need to address the needs of economically disadvantaged and culturally diverse parents (Woods & Baker, 1999).

### Conclusion

Effectiveness of this study is reflected in the statistical results and case studies. All statistical results and case study examinations suggest that the Best Families program had a positive impact on most participants. This study is evidence that low-income parents are capable and anxious to develop more effective child-rearing strategies. These findings are consistent with Wood & Baker's (1999) study that reported that parents are interested in parenting programs and their participation, or lack of it, may be influenced by various pragmatic and attitudinal factors.

## Appendix A

Janet Sang-Blodgett  
Graduate Student  
University of Maryland  
Institute for Child Study  
3304 Benjamin Building  
Department of Human Development  
University of Maryland  
College Park, Maryland 20742

Director  
Head Start Program

Dear Director:

I am interested in presenting the Best Families parent education program to the parents of your program. The Best Families program teaches parents emotional regulation, child self-regulation, a problem solving approach to parent-child conflict and communication skills. This program has been developed specifically for parents involved in federal and state funded early childhood intervention programs. I believe this program will be effective in training parents how to raise their children in a non-violent manner through modeling appropriate behaviors and developing problem solving and communication skills. I would appreciate your support and cooperation for this project.

I would like to present this program as a research project and assess the results of its effectiveness. Many parenting programs are presented with little, if any, relevant information as to the implementation or effectiveness of the training. The Best Families program will be evaluated for appropriate and timely content, parents' problem solving skills and abilities, parent-child communication styles, parent

perception of child behavior, and teacher perception of child behavior. Interviews with parents will be conducted by undergraduate students from nearby college and will consist of oral administration of three instruments and one questionnaire two weeks prior to beginning the program and at the completion of the program. The Best Families parent training will be presented by this researcher.

I have enclosed a letter, registration form, and self-addressed envelope to be given to each parent in your program which describes the Best Families parent education program and solicits their participation in the program. I am requesting that you distribute one to each parent in your center during the first week of your program.

Thank you for your cooperation with this endeavor. Should you have any further questions about the program or training, please feel free to contact me.

Sincerely

Janet Sang-Blodgett

## Appendix B

Best Families  
Consultation & Training  
Janet Sang-Blodgett  
1225 Yearsley Drive  
Dover, DE 19904

Dear Parent,

The Head Start will be providing the parents involved in their program with the opportunity to participate in a new child development program called Best Families. This program has been designed to assist parents to raise their children in a non-violent fashion and to teach them strategies for leading successful lives

The Best Families Program is designed to assist parents to develop and to teach to their children the skills and strategies needed for social problem solving, verbalization of emotions, effective parent-child communication, and social support. The Best Families program will consist of one 2 hour training session a week for four weeks.

Please return the enclosed registration form in the self-addressed stamped envelope or return it to your child's Head Start teacher. Thank you in advance for your participation in the program and the interest you demonstrate to assist your child in finding future success.

Sincerely,

Janet Sang-Blodgett

Best Families  
Consultation & Training  
Janet Sang-Blodgett  
1225 Yearsley Drive  
Dover, DE 19904

Dear Parent,

The Best Families program will begin at the Head Start Center on \_\_\_\_\_ . This child development program was presented to you on \_\_\_\_\_ or you may have received a flyer and registration form from your Head Start Director. We are excited to begin the program and look forward to meeting you. We will meet with you prior to the first session to gather information that will be helpful to the trainer in providing you with the effective tools and strategies to understand and to assist in your child's development.

This program has been designed to assist parents to raise their children in a non-violent fashion and to teach them strategies for leading successful lives. A copy of the agenda for Session # 1 of the Best Families program is enclosed.

Should you have any questions or need assistance with transportation, please contact your Head Start Family Services Worker. Child Care and lunch/dinner will be provided. Thank you in advance for your participation in the program and the interest you have demonstrated to assist your child in finding future success.

Sincerely,

Janet Sang-Blodgett

## BEST FAMILIES

### Parenting Education Program

Beginning July 9, 2001 the Southern Delaware Center for children & Families will host parent training presented by Janet Sang-Blodgett, Best Families Consultation and Training Program, which will focus on a problem solving method of child rearing. We want to explore some of the everyday problems that you experience with your children. For example your child might do something that he/she shouldn't do, or fight with other children, or refuse to listen, etc. Would you please list the problems that you observe with children in general.

1. \_\_\_\_\_
2. \_\_\_\_\_
3. \_\_\_\_\_
4. \_\_\_\_\_
5. \_\_\_\_\_

I, \_\_\_\_\_, give my consent to participate in the BEST FAMILIES program and grant permission to Janet Sang-Blodgett, Best Families Consultation & Training Program, to use the above information for research and training purposes only.

Date \_\_\_\_\_

## Appendix C

# **Best Families AGENDA**

## **Session # 1**

### **Welcome and Introductions**

### **Social Problem Solving Overview**

#### **Pre-requisite Skills**

**Language  
Feelings**

#### **Social Problem Solving Skills**

**Generating Alternatives  
Evaluating Consequences**

#### **Practice Social Problem Solving Steps**

**What is the problem?  
How do you feel?  
What else can I do?  
What might happen?  
Did it work?**

#### **Introduction to “Buddy System”**

#### **Questions/Answers and Summary**

# **Best Families**

## **AGENDA**

### **Session # 2**

#### **Welcome**

#### **Discussion of Home Assignments**

#### **Review of Social Problem Solving Steps**

- What is the problem?**
- How do you feel?**
- What else can I do?**
- What might happen?**
- Did it work?**

#### **Your Emotional IQ**

#### **Verbalizing Emotions**

- Active listening skills**
- Speaking up effectively**
- Validating other's feelings**
- Expressing feelings**
- Communication blocks**

#### **Questions/Answers and Summary**

# **Best Families**

## **AGENDA**

### **Session # 3**

#### **Welcome**

#### **Discussion of Home Assignments**

#### **Review of Social Problem Solving Steps**

**What is the problem?**

**How do you feel?**

**What else can I do?**

**What might happen?**

**Did it work?**

#### **Parent-Child Communication**

**Self talk**

**Coping strategies**

**Positive communication**

**Blocks to communication**

**Reframing**

#### **Communication styles**

**Commanding/Demanding**

**Telling without explanation**

**Telling with explanation**

**Social Problem Solving**

#### **Questions/Answers and Summary**

# **Best Families**

## **AGENDA**

### **Session # 4**

#### **Welcome**

#### **Discussion of Home Assignments**

#### **Review of Social Problem Solving Steps**

**What is the problem?**

**How do you feel?**

**What else can I do?**

**What might happen?**

**Did it work?**

#### **Social Support**

**Fostering Self-care**

**Self-reinforcement strategies**

**Feedback**

**Consistent messages**

**Compliance**

**Support**

#### **Demonstration & Role play**

#### **Group discussion**

#### **Questions/Answers and Summary**

Session one:

Discuss what parents have already heard about Social Problem Solving and teach the essential concepts based on their current understanding;

Introduce the pre-requisite skills of social problem solving, language and identification and awareness of feelings;

Introduce the social problem concepts of alternative thinking and evaluating consequences.

Practice generating alternatives to problems parents are experiencing;

Practice using the social problem solving steps.

Ask for ideas about how and when the consequential step of asking: ""What might happen?" might be used at home;

Assign the practice of the question as a home activity;

Encourage parents to write down their experiences if they would like, and also to come to the next meeting to talk over their experiences.

Hand out vignettes and solicit volunteers for role-playing.

Demonstrate and practice together.

Introduce and begin the "Buddy system"

Assignments for home practice:

Assign the practice of the consequential step of asking ""What might happen?" as a home activity;

Encourage parents to practice using the strategies of: "What might happen next?", "What else could you do", and "Can you find something to do while you wait?" with their children at home.

Have participants call their assigned "Buddy" at least one time during the week.

Session two:

Discuss parents' reactions, comments, and challenges since the first meeting;

Review and demonstrate social problem solving steps:

Introduce and discuss verbalizing emotions component and the objectives;

Complete and discuss self-report questionnaires;

Demonstrate and role play vignettes:

Discuss difficulties encountered carrying out home assignments;

Discuss and encourage parents to build support systems within the group;

Assignment for home practice with their families:

Have parents continue to practice social problem solving strategies in the home with their children.

Have parents practice 'active listening' with their family members and report on how it worked and how it felt to them.

Have parents set a timer for different amounts of time and take a minute to verbalize how they are feeling. Identify and name the feeling.

Give parents a children's book to read to their children and discuss it with them to illustrate a way parents could talk to them about social problem solving, verbalizing emotions, and parent-child communication;

Have participants call their 'Buddy' at least once during the week.

Session Three:

Discuss parents' reactions, comments, and challenges since the last meeting;

Using literature (book previously handed out), demonstrate and practice generating alternatives and evaluating consequences;

Introduce and discuss parent-child communication concepts;

Demonstrate the four styles of communication with emphasis on social problem solving style;

Discuss parent-child problems and have group generate alternatives and evaluate consequences of each idea

Have parent try chosen alternative with family during the week and report back to the group;

Demonstrate and role play vignettes:

Have parents watch a section of a TV family show and discuss with their families to illustrate another way to talk about social problem solving, verbalizing emotions, and parent- child communication;

Assignment for home practice with their families:

Have parents watch a section of a TV family show and discuss with their families to illustrate another way to talk about social problem solving, verbalizing emotions, and parent- child communication;

Have parent try chosen alternative with family during the week and report back to the group;

Have participant call their 'Buddy' at least once during the week.

Session Four:

Discuss parents' reactions, comments, and challenges since the last meeting;

Introduce and discuss Social Support concepts.

Review all components of Best Families program;

Demonstrate and role play vignettes

Allow extra time in this final session for group discussion of what they have learned, anticipated difficulties in using Social Problem Solving, as well as ideas for overcoming these difficulties, and what they see as their own next steps.

Encourage participants to continue to practice strategies in their home with their children and other family members.

Encourage participants to maintain contact with their 'Buddy'.

## Appendix D

### **BEST FAMILIES**

#### CONSENT FORM

I, \_\_\_\_\_, Parent of \_\_\_\_\_, hereby give my consent to Janet Sang-Blodgett to participate in the Best Families program and agree to participate in an interview before and after attending the Best Families program at \_\_\_\_\_ Head Start Center. I also give my consent to Janet Sang-Blodgett to use this information for research and training purposes only.

I understand that I have the right to withdraw this consent at any time.

Parent's Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

Witness: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

# BEST FAMILIES

## Parenting Education Program

Beginning July 9, 2001 the Southern Delaware Center for Children & Families will host parent training presented by Janet Sang-Blodgett, Best Families Consultation and Training Program, which will focus on a problem solving method of child rearing. We want to explore some of the everyday problems that you experience with your children. For example your child might do something that he/she shouldn't do, or fight with other children, or refuse to listen, etc. Would you please list the problems that you observe with children in general.

1. \_\_\_\_\_
2. \_\_\_\_\_
3. \_\_\_\_\_
4. \_\_\_\_\_
5. \_\_\_\_\_
6. \_\_\_\_\_
7. \_\_\_\_\_
8. \_\_\_\_\_
9. \_\_\_\_\_
10. \_\_\_\_\_

I, \_\_\_\_\_, give my consent to participate in the BEST FAMILIES program and grant permission to Janet Sang-Blodgett, Best Families Consultation & Training Program, to use the above information for research and training purposes only.

Date \_\_\_\_\_

## BEST FAMILIES

## **SIGN IN SHEET**

Date

A video recording will be made of this training session. It will be used for training or research purposes only. I hereby give my consent for a video recording to be made of this session.

NAME      ADDRESS      PHONE#

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