

December 11, 2006

Mona
Planned Parenthood
1229 Albany Ave #4
Hartford, CT 06112

Dear Mona,

We are students at Trinity College, and we are doing a public policy project on child abuse in Hartford. After meeting with various community members, we found that the prevention of child abuse is an important but difficult task. One problem is that many parents that are expecting a child are not properly educated on how to raise a child and form a healthy and adequately nurturing environment for them. We have created a packet of information about how to engage in healthy parenting that is intended to help parents learn more about this process.

Child abuse is a serious problem that is unfortunately very prevalent in Hartford. A major risk factor for abusive parents is poverty, and the stresses associated with limited resources. The absence of one parent or drug and alcohol abuse, which we have found to be common in low income families may also contribute to abusive parents. Important research shows that many cases of abuse are a result of lack of knowledge about healthy family relationships, and can be avoided by educating each and every parent that has a newborn baby about positive ways to interact with their child.

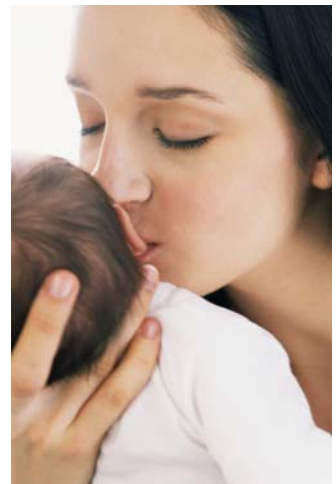
Enclosed you will find a copy of the packet of healthy parenting tips that we created for new families. We hope that you will consider distributing it to all of your clients that are expecting a newborn. We believe that this packet really does have the ability to prevent some cases of child abuse by opening the parent's eyes to a healthy way in which to raise their children. Thank you for your time and consideration. If you have any questions, please feel free to contact us.

Sincerely,

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A Guide Book for Expecting Parents



Congratulations on your new child! Raising a child is a challenging, yet rewarding adventure. As a parent you have a very important job. Your child will look up to you for guidance, comfort, and love for their entire life.

This packet will provide you with some useful information and tips for how to interact with your baby and how to overcome obstacles that you may run into in the journey of raising your child. For further information there is a list of resources at the end of this packet.

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Tips for the First Few Weeks

The first few weeks of parenting can be overwhelming. During this exciting time it is important to take care of both yourself *and* your baby. Here are a few tips to make the first few weeks a little bit easier:

-Get as much sleep as you can. Try to sleep when your baby sleeps.

-Eat healthy foods. Don't reject a neighbor or a friend if they offer to help you out by cooking dinner!

-Don't expect *too* much from yourself. But make sure your priorities are straight. (Don't worry so much about housework and other less-important things).

-Join a parenting support group. It will always help to hear that other people are going through the same thing that you are.

-If you have older children, make sure to let them know how much you love them too.

-Call your doctor if you have any questions or concerns. It is better to be sure that everything is okay...this will eliminate needless worrying as well.

-Make sure your child receives all of the necessary immunizations.

-If you find yourself getting frustrated or stressed out, ask for help from family, friends, or any of the resources listed on page 8.

Positive Guidance for your Child

By using positive guidance, you can guide your children on appropriate behaviors while strengthening their self-esteem

Guide your child's behavior with firmness and kindness. This will help your child cooperate and learn acceptable behavior while feeling secure.

Give your child choices. When possible, give your child a choice between at least 2 different options. This will make your child feel more in control and help them develop self-esteem and self-confidence.

Give clear, simple directions. Be sure that you have their full attention and that your expectations are reasonable given the child's age.

Provide a safe and interesting play environment. Children are more likely to misbehave if they are bored. Offer a lot of fun (and age-appropriate) toys and activities, but make sure to child-proof the environment.

Set clear limits. (limits are not rules—they are flexible boundaries) Limits should be set for safety, to protect the furniture and other household items, and to teach your child responsibility.

Be consistent. Frequent changes to the rules will be very confusing for your child.

Follow through. When you say something, mean it! Be firm but kind when enforcing rules.

Use praise and positive statements often. Children love to be praised and it is an effective way to encourage good behavior. Be specific ("I love it when you put your coat away. Thank you! It makes me very happy!")

Remember that no two children are alike...so pick and choose from this list as necessary to fit each child and situation.

Discipline Techniques

Misbehavior can result from a variety of things. Your child may be frustrated, scared or intimidated. Or they may simply be hungry, tired, uncomfortable or bored. As a parent, how you deal with your child's misbehavior at a young age is very crucial. The following are a few ideas on how to deal with your child's misbehavior.

Reflection. When a child misbehaves, stop and reflect on what might be causing the behavior and what the child may be trying to communicate to you with his or her actions. For example, the child may be hungry.

Active listening. Listen closely to what the child is really trying to tell you. Helping your child express their true feelings and acknowledging that they are important may be enough to calm the child and stop the inappropriate behavior.

Redirection. When your child is doing something inappropriate, direct their attention to another more suitable activity.

Negotiation and Problem Solving. Negotiation should be used in situations between two or more children. Try to help your child solve their problem without placing blame about "who had it first" or "who started it."

Consequences: Let the child know that there are consequences for their inappropriate behavior. For example, if a child throws sand let them know that they will not be allowed to play in the sandbox for the rest of the day.

Time-out. Time-out is meant to help a child calm down if they are acting inappropriately. It works best when your child is between the ages of 3 and 12. *Make sure your child does not feel shamed or isolated from their peers in time-out.* Make sure the time-out is not too long. Finally, make sure to praise the child if their behavior improves after their time-out.

Healthy Ways to Cope with Stress

Sometimes the everyday pressures of parenting will seem overwhelmingly stressful. If you ever get to the point where you feel like lashing out, stop and do one of the following:

- Take a deep breath & remember you are the adult in the situation.
- Close your eyes and imagine that you are your child and you are hearing what they are about to hear from you.
- Press your lips together and count to 10...or 20.
- Put your child in a time-out chair (give them one minute for each year of age).
- Put *yourself* in a time-out chair so that you can cool down.
- Think about why you are angry...is your child making you angry? Or is your child an easy outlet for your anger?
- Call a friend.
- Take a walk outside and get some fresh air (if there is somebody who can watch your child).
- Take a hot bath, or splash some water on your face.
- Sing along to some music to release your frustration.
- Hug a pillow.
- Write down as many helpful and positive words you can think of.
- NEVER** shake your baby. This can result in serious harm or even death.

Suggested Activities

Playing with your child is very important in establishing a healthy and secure relationship. Playing is also vital for your child's physical, social, cognitive, and emotional development. Be sure to play with your child every day!

For birth-age one:

- Move a brightly-colored toy back and forth slowly. Let your baby follow it with their eyes.
- Play peek-a-boo by hiding your face behind a blanket.
- Let the baby stretch to reach a toy by placing it almost out of reach.

For ages one-three:

- Invite your child's friend over to play with toys.
- Help your toddler learn new words by naming everyday things you see around you, like trees, birds, spoons, tables...etc.
- Sit your toddler on your lap and look at a book with them.
- Play music and sing to your child.

For ages three-five:

- Set up bowling games using smaller toys as bowling pins to knock them down.
- Use old clothes and costumes to dress up and act out fairytales you read together.
- Play with memory games and puzzles.
- Avoid restricting your child's play to stereotypical activities. Let them choose their own toys.
- Let your child create rules for playing and follow their lead.

****Make sure the playing environment is safe!****

Resources

These resources will assist you with any questions or problem you may have. Do not hesitate to use them because they are here just for you!

- **2-1-1 Infoline:** A source for information about community services, referrals for human services, and crisis intervention. It operates 24 hours a day, 365 days a year. Multilingual caseworkers and TDD access is available. You can access INFOLINE toll-free from anywhere in Connecticut just by dialing 2-1-1.
- **Department of Social Services (1-800-385-4052):** Food assistance, parent support centers, child support enforcement, child care services, health insurance.
- **Family Support Council (1-866-623-1315):** Information, support, and family networks for parents of children with special needs.
- **Child Care Assistance Program (1-888-214-5437):** Provides financial assistance for child care to eligible low-income working families.
- **greatkidsCT (www.greatkids.CT.org) :** A website devoted to information on parenting, education, health and safety; includes a Training Calendar that lists available workshops across the state for parents and caregivers.
- **Wheeler Clinic HelpLine (860-747-3434):** Referral to and information about mental health or addiction treatment services; crisis intervention; supportive listening.
- **Playing for Keeps (www.playing for keeps.org):** This site has great information on the importance of child's play and some great play activities to do with children to promote growth and development.

Note: Some information provided by Child Health and Development Institute of Development, Inc. and Prevent Child Abuse America