

# **Introduction to CAECTI's Parent Mentoring Program**

## **Philosophy and Definition**

The Capital Area Early Childhood Institute is a community-based initiative designed to provide training and information to parents and child care providers of children birth to three years of age. The Institute currently serves parents and child care providers in selected centers in Dauphin, Cumberland and Perry counties, as well as child care providers in York and Centre counties. In 2001, the Institute expanded the existing infant and toddler mentoring program in the Capital area to include parents in the one-on-one mentoring approach.

The Institute proposes a mentoring program targeting parents that will support the parents' ability to provide sensitive and nurturing care for their child. The Institute focuses its mentoring program on enhancing the protective factors within the parent/child relationship in order to foster positive parenting skills. The program addresses the special needs of infants, toddlers and their families through a prescriptive, problem-solving approach.

The Capital Area Early Childhood Training Institute's Mentoring Program has utilized research from numerous disciplines that address the needs of infants, toddlers, parents and caregivers. The principles that guide the Institute's Mentoring Program are described below.

Effective mentoring includes core knowledge of appropriate child care and parenting practices; an understanding of the needs of the family; direct observation; individualized reflective supervision for relationship building and collegial support from the mentor.

The relationship-based training approach defines the mentor-parent relationship. A relationship-based approach is one that fully acknowledges both the complexity of relationships that exist within families and the trust that develops between the mentor and parent. Mentors take the time to get to know the parent and family in their environment, as well as their individual needs and expectations of the mentoring program. Trust is built upon clear expectations about how the parent and the mentor will work together and what each hopes to accomplish during the mentoring sessions. Mentors focus on the strengths of the family and builds upon his or her knowledge about children and child development within the context of the family. Mentors do not judge the parents or their actions. Instead, they lead the parents to self-awareness and guide them toward providing the best care for their child.

Change is a process that takes time and initiating changes means taking a risk. Change is a highly personal experience with its own timeline. The parents will more likely persevere despite barriers and anxieties when they understand the benefits of change, can anticipate the problems, know their feelings will be accepted, and know that their goals and objectives are clearly defined.

### **Policies that Structure the Mentoring Program**

Specific policies are designed to help mentors establish and maintain professional boundaries.

Mentors will:

- Model behaviors and interactions, demonstrate techniques and make suggestions during observations
- Never be alone with children

- Meet with each parent/family at a time that has been mutually prescheduled and planned
- Call to confirm day, time, and location of each observation and visit, showing respect for unexpected events that may occur
- Attend all Institute sponsored training events that the parents may attend
- Not engage in gossip about children or families
- Share conflicts with the Training Coordinator, and/or Statewide Coordinator, who will assess the situation and intervene when necessary
- Adhere to the ethical standards outlined by NAEYC in Code of Ethical Conduct and Statement of Commitment
- Maintain confidentiality concerning issues and information about children and families

### **Goals of the Capital Area Early Childhood Training Institute's Mentoring Program**

- To improve the quality of care that infants and toddlers receive by providing their parents with on-site training and support through a mentoring relationship with an early childhood professional
- To collect initial and ongoing data to provide analysis of the success of this type of training intervention
- To utilize the data collected as quantitative evidence that on-site, intensive training is an effective method to improve parenting behavior

## **Relationship Building**

### **Building Initial Relationships**

The key to the success of our mentoring program, and what differentiates mentor training from other methods, is building a trusting relationship between mentor and parent. The ability of the mentor to initiate and develop the

relationship is of as much importance as the information and resources that the mentor has to offer. Adults, like children, learn best in the context of a positive, trusting relationship.

It is important for the mentor to spend time before meeting with the parent to define what he/she is expecting from the mentoring process. Because of the one-on-one nature of the training, the mentor should understand what skills/knowledge/experience that he/she brings to the relationship, and also what he/she hopes to gain from the relationship.

The approach that the mentor takes when working with the parent needs to be supportive, effective, and respectful. In supporting the parent as a learner, the mentor should be open-minded and should work to find a common ground for collaboration. The mentor needs to support new ideas and attempts and be willing to assist in non-judgmental evaluation of success.

The mentors will begin the intervention by observing and getting to know the family for several visits. This time will be spent learning about the routines, family dynamics, home environment, getting to know the children, and of course beginning the mentor/parent relationship. After the first few visits, the mentors will work with the parent to define the expectations that each has for the mentoring process, and the goals and direction that the intervention will take.

The Early Childhood Mentoring Curriculum: A Handbook for Mentors has some helpful information about relationship building in the mentoring process on pages 64-71. Topics covered include: establishing expectations and setting goals, the structure of the relationship, and the stages of the relationship.

## **Ongoing Maintenance**

As our mentoring program progressed, we found it beneficial to meet on a regular basis to share information about how things were progressing, triumphs and difficulties, and to keep everyone informed and "on the same sheet of music". We took a multi-disciplinary approach at these meetings, so that we could pool our various areas of expertise and brainstorm ideas and techniques to try with each of the families. We chose to meet bi-weekly, in order to allow the mentors to have more time to work with their families and also the infant and toddler caregivers.

## **Adult Learning**

### **Principles of Adult Learning**

Part of being an effective instructor and mentor involves understanding how adults learn best. Adults have special needs and requirements as learners. Malcolm Knowles identified the following characteristics of adult learners:

- Adults are autonomous and self-directed. Mentors must actively involve adult participants in the learning process and serve as facilitators for them. Assess participants' perspectives about what should be covered and let them work on projects that reflect their interests.
- Adults have accumulated life experiences and knowledge and they need to connect learning to this knowledge/experience base.
- Adults are goal-oriented. Mentors must show participants how the intervention will help them attain their goals.
- Adults are relevancy-oriented. They must see a reason for learning something. Learning has to be applicable to their work or other responsibilities to be of value to them.

- Adults are practical and will focus on aspects of learning that will be most useful to them in their work.
- Adults need to be shown respect. Adults should be treated as equals in experience and knowledge.

### **Motivating the Adult Learner**

Six factors serve as sources of motivation for adult learning. They are:

- Social relationships
- External expectations
- Social welfare
- Personal advancement
- Escape or Stimulation
- Cognitive interest

### **Barriers Against Participating in Learning**

- Lack of time
- Lack of money
- Lack of confidence
- Lack of information about opportunities to learn
- Scheduling problems
- Problems with child care and transportation
- The best way to motivate adult learners is to enhance their reasons for learning and decrease the barriers.

## **Learning Styles**

Learning styles are influenced by childhood experiences, families, cultures, schooling and social and economic backgrounds. Howard Gardner describes certain kinds of intelligence in which people bring to learning environments.

- Intrapersonal intelligence is understanding things through individual projects, research and reflection
- Interpersonal intelligence is interacting with others to answer questions, solve problems and create representations
- Musical intelligence is developing understanding using rhythm and musical patterns
- Spatial intelligence is using diverse media to understand the world
- Kinesthetic intelligence is using movement to translate understanding of the world

## **Adult Learning Bibliography**

*Zemke, Ron and Susan. 30 things We Know For Sure About Adult Learning. Innovations Abstract, Vol VI, No 8, March 9, 1984.*

*Zemke, Ron and Susan. Principles of Adult Learners.*

*Lieb, Stephen. Principles of Adult Learning.*

*Bellm, Whitebook & Hnatiuk. The Early Childhood Mentoring Curriculum. 1997. The National Center for the Early Childhood Work Force, Washington, D.C.*

## **Home Visiting**

One component of the Parent Mentoring program is the option of mentors working with families in the home. This component offers advantages to both the mentor and the family.

The advantages for the families working with a mentor in the home include:

- Access to a resource that can supply information and strategies based on the individual child and the needs of the family
- The ability to work with a professional who sees their child in the familiar, comfortable surroundings of home
- The ability to establish a learning relationship in surroundings that are comfortable for the family, and that don't require time spent away from the family

The advantages for the mentor include:

- The opportunity to work with families in a partnership, and to foster the family/childcare center relationship.
- The ability to see the child in his or her natural surroundings, and within the context of his or her family
- The possibility to have a positive impact on a child's life through a relationship-based approach with both the childcare provider and the family

Initially, both mentors and parents may feel apprehensive about the in-home mentoring process. For the families, it may be intimidating to have another adult in their home; parents may feel that they are being watched and critiqued, or that they're "doing it wrong". For the mentor, it may be uncomfortable to enter unfamiliar territory; working with families in their home brings a personal dimension to the mentoring relationship. It is important for the mentor to be sensitive to both their own feelings and those of the families they are working with in order to build a trusting, non-threatening relationship.

## **Suggestions for Successful Home Visits**

In order to make the in-home mentoring component as successful as possible, it is important for mentors to carefully plan the visits, just as they would when working with caregivers.

### **Before the Visit:**

- Schedule the visit at a time that works well for both the parent and the mentor. Be specific about how long the visit should take, and what the parent can expect, so that the parent can plan and prepare accordingly.
- Get detailed directions to the home; ask where to park, what entrance to go to, etc.
- Find out who will be present at the home when the visit will take place.
- Ask the parent if he or she would like you to bring along any resources or information.
- Call to confirm the visit the day prior.

### **During the Visit:**

- Start the visit off right by arriving on time.
- Set a warm and pleasant tone upon arrival. Introduce yourself to everyone present at the home.
- It may help to bring along an age-appropriate toy or game for the child(ren) to play with, so that the mentor and parent(s) can talk.
- Each visit should have a specific objective. Initially, the objective will be to get to know the family and home routine. Once the mentor and family have become comfortable with each other, the mentor should partner with the parents to set the goals and objectives for each meeting.

- Give the parent(s) the opportunity to share information about their family and home routine. The tone between mentor and parent should be conversational rather than question and answer.
- Recognize and reinforce the strengths of the family, the parent(s), and the child.
- Give the parent(s) the opportunity to share concerns or questions. Ask process and open-ended questions to clarify and gather information (How do you handle that situation? How does that work for you? What do you like about that?)
- Listen to and encourage different points of view with respect and without judgement
- If you need to take notes, let the parents know what you are writing and why, and let them read the notes before you leave.
- Summarize the visit shortly before the agreed-upon ending time to allow for feedback and scheduling the next visit. Ask the parent for input about the visit. Discuss the goal for the next visit and select a time with the parent that is convenient for both of you.
- Conclude the visit on time, and thank the family for allowing you to come.

### **Maintaining Safety While Home Visiting**

The safety of the mentor will remain the first priority at all times while conducting home visits. If at any time the mentor feels that a situation is unsafe, the mentor should politely conclude the visit. If the mentor is nervous about making a home visit, the training coordinator can come along. The following tips should help a mentor maintain safety:

- Before conducting home visits, the training coordinator should have the visit schedule, location, and duration.

- Get specific directions to the home. If possible, locate the home a day or two prior to the visit.
- If possible, make home visits during daylight hours. Don't hesitate to ask the parent to escort you to your car after dark or to watch from the door to make sure you get in your vehicle and start it.
- Park in a well-lit, visible location close to the home. Be observant of the surroundings.
- Do not enter a home until someone comes to the door to open it for you. If the person you are supposed to be meeting with is not there, do not enter the home.
- Bring as little as possible with you into the home. Lock any valuables in the car trunk or other location that is not visible. Always lock your car.
- Be aware of the layout of the home and neighborhood. Note the exits of the home. Ask to be introduced to people in the home that you do not know.
- If you feel threatened by family pets (or are allergic) ask that they be put in a separate area of the home.
- If you encounter a situation that you feel is threatening, quickly but courteously leave. You may say something like "I'm not going to be able to stay today like we planned" or "Maybe this is not a good time for a visit - I'll call to reschedule".

### **Home Visiting Bibliography**

*Klass, Carol, Home Visiting: Promoting Healthy Parent and Child Development, 1996.*

*Head Start Home Visiting Training Materials*

## **Routines and Schedules for Infants and Toddlers**

### **Infants**

In caring for their infant, it is important for parents to work within their infant's individual schedule and needs in order to provide care that is sensitive and responsive. Each infant will develop his or her own patterns for eating, sleeping, and playing; these patterns may change as the child grows and develops.

This responsive care has many benefits to both the child and the parent. First of all, the child will become more content and trustful when his or her needs are met and the methods for communicating those needs are responded to. As the parent meets the infants routine care needs (feeding, diapering, etc), there will be many opportunities for rich, one-on-one interaction.

Mentors working with parents may need to model, demonstrate and encourage the use of daily routines as opportunities for quality interactions and one-on-one time with their infant. Songs, games, and discussions with the babies can easily be incorporated into the daily routines of care, and will make for a much more rich environment.

### **Toddlers**

As the baby moves into toddlerhood, they will require a lot of patience and good humor! Usually the child will have developed a fairly regular schedule of eating and sleeping, as well as active and quiet periods during their day. As their skills develop and they begin to see themselves as separate from their parent, they will strive for more and more independence.

It is important for parents to continue to take their cues from the child with regard to routines and schedules. Toddlers respond well to consistency through the day; knowing that after playtime comes lunch, then a story, then a nap helps them to feel some control over their world and gives them a sense of security.

Mentors working with parents may need to support parents as their toddlers assert their blossoming independence. Providing parents with information about their child's development and strategies that encourage independence, such as offering acceptable choices, may make the transition from infancy to toddlerhood easier for all.

### ***Routines and Schedules Bibliography***

*Greenman and Stonehouse. Primetimes: A Handbook for Excellence in Infant and Toddler Programs. p. 63-64, 41, and 118-119. St. Paul, MN: Redleaf Press, 1996.*

*Dodge, Yandian, and Bloomer. A Trainer's Guide to The Creative Curriculum for Infants and Toddlers. p. 83-85, 151,181, and 272-274. Washington, DC: Teaching Strategies, Inc., 1998.*

*Dombro, Colker, and Dodge. The Creative Curriculum for Infants and Toddler Programs. p. 91 and 329. Washington, DC: Teaching Strategies, Inc., 1999.*

*Albrecht and Miller. Innovations: The Comprehensive Infant Curriculum. p.427. Beltsville, MD: Gryphon House, 2000.*

## Attachment

In working with parents, mentors must emphasize how important it is for children to have a sense of belonging, being loved and trust in their environment. Warm and caring relationships with adults provide children with the basis for all types of learning. Items that can assist in building this sense of trust are:

- Involved parenting and caregiving. This includes high levels of touching, hugging, holding, prolonged conversations and interactive joy.
- Low stress separations and reunions.
- Providing secure base for exploration.
- Stimulation to encourage language and discovery.
- Meeting physical needs and physical comfort
- Positive relationships with other adults and children.

When infants and toddlers develop attachments with their parents, and also with other adult caregivers, they form affectionate bonds that create a sense of trust and a secure base. This sense of trust supports the infant's exploration of the world. When parents select a childcare setting for their infant or toddler, they should look for a situation with the following characteristics:

- Small groups of children - for infants, no more than 6 to 8 children; and toddlers, 6 to 10 children with at least two adults.
- A primary caregiver assigned to infants and toddlers to promote consistency and responsiveness.
- A schedule that keeps groups of children with the same caregiver for an extended period of time.
- Low staff turnover to reduce anxiety caused by changes.
- Active parent participation to establish close communication.

## **Attachment Bibliography**

*"Early Years are Learning Years. An Important Bond: Your Child and Your Caregiver," Release #4, NAEYC, 1996.*

*Raikes, H. A Secure Base for Babies: Applying Attachment Concepts to the Infant Care Setting. Young Children, July, 1996.*

## **Language Development**

Infants and toddlers learn about the world through their senses. Language development in these early years depends greatly on the attention the parent shows towards the infant or toddler. Constant eye contact, touch, facial expression and responses with the voice in varied tones are crucial to early language development.

The following are suggestions for parents to promote and encourage early language expression and development:

- Parents should read to their children, even young infants, every day. Choose books appropriate for the age and developmental level of the child.
- Book selections for infants should include "chubby" books, cloth books, sound books and interactive books. Books should be kept clean and in good condition.
- Recite simple poems during routine activities, such as diaper changing, feeding bathing, etc.
- Encourage dance and movement. Play a variety of different types of music and instruments.

- Use real and safe objects such as beach balls, cups, pans, sponges, boxes, water, washcloths, etc. for play.
- Use soft, cuddly and safe puppets to speak to the children.
- Elaborate on the infant's one-word sentences by repeating infants' attempts at new words and then modeling the word or phrase for the child to facilitate language development.
- Describe children's actions during playtime and routine caregiving activities, for example, "Now we are going to wash hands for lunch. Doesn't the water feel cool? Look at the bubbles you're making with the soap!"

### **Language Development Bibliography**

*Barclay, K., Banally, C., & Curtis, A., "Literacy Begins at Birth: What Caregivers Can Learn from Parents of Children Who Read Early," Young Children, (May, 1995).*

*French, L., "I Told You All About It, So Don't Tell Me You Don't Know: Two Year Olds and Learning Through Language," Young Children, (January, 1996).*

### **Cognitive Development**

Cognitive development is the process of learning to think and to reason. Infants are born ready to learn, and this learning is accomplished through a combination of the environments they are in and the relationships they form with the people around them.

Infants learn about themselves, others, and the world around them through daily routines, activities, and interactions. As they eat, play with toys, have

their diaper changed, get dressed, or move about the room they are collecting and processing information about how things work.

At first, infants learn about the world around them by using their senses to collect information. Babies need to see, hear, smell, feel and even taste things to learn about them. They organize this information and then reorganize it as they experience more and more. They develop their first ideas about themselves and the things in their world through these experiences.

Infants also learn by doing. They gather information through active involvement with their environment and the people around them. They learn by observing what happens when they interact with objects and people, and then relate this information to what they already know. It is important for parents to remember that what is routine to adults is new and exciting to infants - rolling a ball, for example, and having an adult roll it back to them. Infants learn simple concepts, and then build upon this knowledge through more and more experience with the world around them.

As infants develop into toddlers, they are able to take a more active role in the interactions they have with the people and things in their environment. Through their play, they learn about cause and effect; that their actions have an impact on the people and things in their world. By providing toddlers with a safe environment that encourages exploration, parents can help their toddlers enhance their thinking skills, and build their knowledge about their world.

Infants and toddlers learn best when they feel safe and secure, and when they are in the care of adults that they trust and can depend on to meet their needs. By learning to understand and respond to their baby's cues, parents will establish the trusting relationship that will help to facilitate their child's cognitive development.

Mentors working with parents may find that parents are concerned about their child's learning, and may want their child's caregivers to be "teaching" concepts such as the alphabet and numbers. Mentors need to reinforce the value of play in the learning process, and also the appropriateness of learning through play for infants and toddlers.

### **Cognitive Development Bibliography**

*Greenman and Stonehouse. Primetimes: A Handbook for Excellence in Infant and Toddler Programs. St. Paul, MN: Redleaf Press, 1996.*

*Wesley, PW, Dennis, BC, and Tyndall, ST QuickNotes: Inclusion Resources for Early Childhood Professionals, Lewisville, NC, Kaplan Press.*

*Pratt, Martha, "The Importance of Infant/Toddler Interactions", Young Children, July, 1999, pgs. 26 - 28.*

### **Social/Emotional Development**

The social and emotional development of an infant seems more of a mystery to parents than physical or language development, where milestones are more easily observed. Parents can hear the beginning babbles of their infant, or see them roll over or sit up. It is more difficult to observe and infant's feelings of fear, anger, or love.

An infant begins to develop socially right from birth. Babies are born dependant on the adults in their lives, and must interact with those around them in order to get what they need. As the baby develops, so does the complexity of social skills. Toddlers begin to realize that not only are they separate individuals, but that others have different desires and attitudes than their own. They also realize that their actions can have an impact on how others react. Through experimentation, infants and toddlers learn the complexities of social interaction.

When a baby is born, about half of the brain's emotional framework is developed. Babies experience their emotions initially in physical ways - with increases in heart rate or in motor activity. Babies also display facial expressions to convey emotions. As the baby grows and develops, the way in which emotions are expressed become more complex. Infants also learn about other people's emotions in physical ways. They observe those around them and respond to voice tone, facial expression, and body language.

Mentors working with parents must reinforce the importance of the parent's role in their child's healthy social and emotional development, and also how this healthy development forms the foundation for the child's physical and cognitive development as well.

### **Physical Development**

As an infant grows and develops, the most easily observed signs of this development are the physical milestones. Parents and caregivers alike look forward to the child's "firsts" - rolling over, sitting up, tentative steps. These signs also can become a source of stress for parents and caregivers, particularly when a child is delayed from the "normal" age at which they achieve certain milestones.

Infants develop motor control from the head down. As their movements progress from reflexive to intentional, they first are able to control their head and neck. The control then progresses to the arms and hands, the torso, and finally the legs. It is important to remember that the motor development generally follows a sequence.

When working with parents, mentors should reinforce the sequential aspect of physical development, rather than specific ages at which milestones occur. Of

course, if a child is developing with a significant delay beyond that which is considered the normal age range, the mentor should be able to offer the parent information about agencies that can fully evaluate the child's development.

### **Physical Development Bibliography**

*Wesley, PW, Dennis, BC, and Tyndall, ST QuickNotes: Inclusion Resources for Early Childhood Professionals, Lewisville, NC, Kaplan Press.*

*Zero to Three, Caring for Infants and Toddlers in Groups: Developmentally Appropriate Practice, 1995.*

### **Positive Guidance**

Positive Guidance is a process by which all children learn to control and direct their own behavior and become independent and self-reliant through strategies facilitated by their caregivers. Using positive discipline strategies teaches children what to do by letting them know when they do something appropriate. The goals of positive guidance are to promote independence, autonomy, self-esteem, and caring toward others and the physical environment. The foundation for these goals is a developmentally appropriate curriculum and learning environment. Positive guidance is based on respect for all children and their families.

Parents' roles in positive guidance include:

- Meeting children's physical, emotional, and intellectual needs.
- Establishing expectations/responsibilities with children.
- Developing a safe, secure, and responsive environment.

- Fostering self-esteem through reinforcing appropriate behavior.
- Guiding children toward learning self-control.
- Encouraging children to be independent.
- Modifying adult behavior as necessary.
- Often times parents create environments or situations that undermine their ability to use positive guidance because the limits don't match the developmental abilities of the children. Some of these settings include:
  - Materials that are too simple or too challenging
  - Lots of waiting time or sitting still time
  - Inflexible routines, space, schedules and people
  - Too little order or routine
  - Too much change
  - Too many accessible places and objects that are off limits
  - Activities in which children can't be "hands on"

### **Unrealistic expectations for self-control**

It is important for mentors to let parents identify activities or times of the day when behavior is a challenge, and to analyze what works well or not so well during these times. Many "behavior problems" are actually the result of the parents' expectations or behavior rather than the behavior of the children.

## **Positive Guidance Bibliography**

*Dombro, Colker, and Dodge. The Creative Curriculum For Infants and Toddlers. Washington, DC: Teaching Strategies, Inc., 1999.*

*Greenman and Stonehouse. Primetimes: A Handbook for Excellence in Infant and Toddler Programs. St. Paul, MN: Redleaf Press, 1996. Chapter 9.*

## **Culture**

Culture can be defined as a set of values, beliefs, traditions and experiences of a particular group. The group may be defined in many ways; by national origin, racial experience, common language, religious background, socioeconomic status, region, neighborhood, and family composition.

Every family brings to the mentoring relationship their own culture, which may be very similar to that of the mentor or very different. Mentors must develop an awareness of their own cultural background and experiences, particularly in relationship to their knowledge and beliefs about children and child rearing. In recognizing their own culture and values, the mentor must then recognize that the families they work with may come from cultural backgrounds having differing values with respect to children and child rearing.

It is important in the mentoring process to develop a respect for both the similarities and differences that various cultures present. This can be accomplished by mutual sharing and learning about the values that the mentors and parents have with respect to the care of infants and toddlers. Mentors must recognize that there is sometimes a compromise between what is considered developmentally appropriate and what is culturally appropriate for children and their families.

## **Culture Bibliography**

*Dombro, Colker, and Dodge. The Creative Curriculum For Infants and Toddlers. Washington, DC: Teaching Strategies, Inc., 1999.*

*Bromer, Juliet "Cultural Variations in Child Care: Values and Actions." Young Children (November, 1999), 72-76.*

*Ball, Jessica and Alan Pence. "Beyond Developmentally Appropriate Practice: Developing Community and Culturally Appropriate Practice." Young Children (March, 1999), 46-49.*

*Gonzalez-Mena, Janet and Navaz Bhavnagri. "Diversity and Infant/Toddler Caregiving." Young Children (September, 2000), 31-35.*

## **It Takes Two to Talk - The Hanen Program® for Parents**

CAECTI was able to co-sponsor a second mentoring-style training program for parents of infants and toddlers through a partnership with the Capital Area Intermediate Unit (CAIU). The program, It Takes Two to Talk - The Hanen Program® for parents, is facilitated by a speech and language pathologist and focuses on methods of fostering language development in infants and toddlers.

It Takes Two to Talk - The Hanen Program® for parents helps parents learn to make language learning a natural part of everyday conversations, play activities and daily routines at home. The program addresses the parent's vital role in facilitating the children's social and language development and in fostering interaction, pretend play, and the development of emergent literacy. While parents use the knowledge they gain from this program to promote their child's social, language, and early literacy development, it is particularly helpful in addressing the needs of children with language delays, with special needs or those who are learning a second language.

The program combines workshop sessions where concepts are introduced and modeled with videotaping sessions of each parent and child. Following each videotaping session, the facilitator and parent review the tapes together to identify and reinforce the concepts of the program.

The three goals for "It Takes Two to Talk" are:

- Prevention of language delays by helping parents learn how to create a language-rich, highly interactive environment for children at risk for language delays.
- Early language intervention by helping parents provide children who have identified language delays with a language-rich, highly interactive language-learning environment, geared to each child's individual language level and conversational style.
- Enrichment by providing parents of typically-developing children the skills to foster an enriched language learning environment, that builds on their existing language skills and promotes the development of the language of learning.

The goals of "Learning Language and Loving It" go beyond enhancement of language skills. When parents encourage and respond to their child's initiations, taking pleasure in their efforts to communicate and explore, not only do they lay the foundation for language learning, but the responsiveness also helps infants become attached and develop a sense of effectiveness and autonomy. Toddlers learn to separate, explore, and develop their mental capacities. They are, in effect, helping children build trusting relationships, positive self-esteem, and effective learning skills.

## **Program Format**

In order for this program to be effective, parents need to be involved for an extended period of time in order to understand the program's philosophy, to undergo a possible shift in attitude, and to learn to apply the program's strategies flexibly and across contexts. For this reason, the format is intensive.

All training sessions involve experiential learning activities, which ensure all participants' involvement. Session components include a combination of: interactive presentations by the facilitator; hands-on simulated practice of strategies taught during the session; viewing of videotapes filmed in the home, as well as large and small group discussion.

## **Program Content**

Program content is drawn from the guidebook *It Takes Two to Talk* and focuses on how parents can create an environment that fulfills the two conditions on which language development depends, interaction and information.

Because communication and language skills are learned in the context of interactions, each child needs to be engaged in many interactions throughout the day.

To "crack the language code" and develop more advanced language skills, children need to be provided with information, fine-tuned to their receptive and expressive language levels.

Topics of group training sessions include: identification of children's conversational styles, learning to "let the child lead", developing social routines, appropriate use of questions, encouraging peer interaction, learning

how to provide information and experience that promote language learning, and how to let language lead the way to literacy.

### **It Takes Two to Talk, The Hanen Program® for Parents Bibliography**

*It Takes Two to Talk by Ayala Manolson, A Hanen Centre Publication, 1992.*

*Website:<http://www.hanen.org>*

## **Challenges**

### **Recruiting and Participation**

The biggest challenge that we faced in our parent mentoring program was recruiting parents to participate. The parents we targeted were those who had children in the infant and toddler classrooms that we had worked with in the infant toddler mentoring program. While this group allowed for opportunities to work with both the child's parent and caregiver, the difficulty was that these were all working parents.

Since issues like time, childcare, and hectic schedules were barriers for this group of parents, our mentors tried to alleviate as many barriers to participation as possible. The mentors were available to work with parents in the evenings at their homes or at the childcare center. When group workshops were held at centers, they were situated in an infant or toddler classroom, and included the children with the parents. This allowed the parents to be with their child, to have a light meal, and an informal information sharing session with the mentor.

Although initially our Hanen parent program faced some of the same recruiting challenges, through persistence with local intermediate units and case managers in the early intervention system, we were able to form a good sized group of participants.

### **Data Collection**

In order to evaluate the effectiveness of the parent mentoring programs that we conducted, we collected initial data from the parents prior to their participation, and then again at the conclusion of the program. Scheduling the observational portion of the data collection was difficult, since many of the parents had very busy schedules. Fortunately, our observer was very flexible in her scheduling, and conducted many of the visits in the evening or on weekends.