**Introduction**

Children and youth do not develop in a vacuum but are influenced by the environment in which they live (Bronfenbrenner, 1977). Family members and caregivers have the greatest impact on youth development. Schools, neighborhoods, communities, cultures and beliefs also influence development.

The parenting component is designed to provide educational programs that build on parents' and caregivers' strengths, encourage responsibility for guiding children's lives in a positive, nurturing way, and support efforts to improve the environment for youth and families. The task of parents and caregivers is to prepare the next generation to function effectively in the future (Bigner, 1977).

**Component Elements**

Programs for parents and caregivers can stand alone or be linked to youth programs. They include:

- An understanding of growth and development. This helps parents and caregivers have reasonable expectations and nurture appropriate behaviors in children.
- Knowledge of various guidance and discipline methods and help in choosing techniques appropriate for the child's age, situation, and temperament.
- Provision of a safe and healthy environment for youth.
- Identification of individual and family attitudes, values, and goals to build family strengths.
- Encouragement of family rituals and traditions that build family strengths and cohesion.
- Development of external and internal resources and knowledge of available support networks.
- Recognition of family resources and skills in resource management.
- Recognition of potential sources of family stress, the ways stress may impact family interaction, and skills in reducing or coping with stress.
- Development of communication and interpersonal skills, including parents' relationship with each other, parent-child interactions, and parents' relationships with caregivers.
- Awareness of the influence of other caregivers. Skilled interaction and collaboration with other caregivers in the best interests of youth.

**Summary**

The quality of interaction between parents and children, as well as the level of family resources, has been linked to both positive and negative outcomes for youth. Such outcomes include: substance abuse (Simons, Conger, & Whitbeck, 1988), juvenile delinquency (Loeber, 1982), teen suicide (Nelson, Farberow & Litman, 1988), and runaways (Russell, 1981). The type of discipline parents and other caregivers use is often significant. Children whose parents use autocratic or overly permissive discipline are more likely to have problems than children whose parents use democratic guidance techniques.
The quality of the child care environment, including the ratio of caregivers to children, number of children in a group, and provision of developmentally appropriate activities, has also been linked to long-term outcomes such as school performance (Ruopp, Travers, Glantz, & Cohen, 1979), and peer relations (Vandell & Corsanti, 1990). The parent component is essential to the development of children and youth.

References


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