



CENTRE COUNTY PREVENTION COALITION
A SAMHSA Supported Drug-Free Community Coalition
Led By Centre County Drug and Alcohol



January 2009 – Tuning in to Kids

Eileen Wise is Executive Director of Smart Start-Centre County. This weekly column, published on Wednesdays, is a collaboration of Centre County *Communities That Care* serving Bald Eagle, Bellefonte, Penns Valley, and Philipsburg-Osceola Area School Districts, and Care Partnership: Centre Region *Communities That Care* serving the State College Area School District.

One of the biggest challenges facing parents these days is how to help their children handle strong emotions, particularly negative ones like intense frustration, sadness, and anger. Like adults, children come equipped with a wide range of temperamental differences, and they also experience a wide range of emotions. Unlike adults, however, they have to spend years learning the skills of handling or “regulating” their emotions, and then channeling them into appropriate actions.

Research has shown that children who do learn these skills of identifying and regulating emotions in early childhood are more likely to have a successful life—specifically to have close and satisfying relationships, be able to meet the challenges of life, have better health and well-being, and be able to meet their long-term goals.

How do children develop emotional skills, or become “emotionally intelligent”? They learn these skills in their early years by absorbing the direct and indirect messages sent by their parents and caregivers about emotions.

In 2007 Smart Start received a grant from the Centre County Community Foundation to partner with Penn State’s Prevention Research Center and other community partners to present a workshop introducing a novel parenting strategy by its Australian creator, Dr. Sophie Havighurst, from the University of Melbourne. The *Tuning in to Kids: Emotionally Intelligent Parenting* workshop was so well-received that Dr. Havighurst and co-creator Ann Harley returned last May to offer the full training to 55 Centre County participants.

As a result, Centre County now has the only cohort of qualified professionals able to offer this priceless parenting series in the entire United States!

What’s so special about this parenting workshop series and what is Smart Start-Centre County going to do about it? *Tuning in to Kids* consists of 6 weeks (2 hours per week) of guided instruction for parents of preschool-aged children in the techniques that will enable them to become effective “Emotion Coaches”. The key aspects of Emotion Coaching are:

- Being aware of children’s emotions
- Viewing children’s display of emotions as a time for intimacy and teaching
- Helping children to verbally label the emotions being experienced
- Empathizing and validating children’s emotions
- Helping children to solve problems (and setting limits where appropriate)

Centre County professionals trained in the *Tuning in to Kids* model were impressed with the elegance of the sequence of lectures, discussion strategies, and concrete activities, along with the emphasis on treating young children with warmth and empathy.

Wendy Whitesell and Karen Ashcroft of the Bennett Family Center at Penn State will be the first to offer the workshop series to parents at their center early in 2009. At this point Smart Start is seeking funds to coordinate delivery of this workshop series in Centre County. Smart Start welcomes the input of parents in the community. If you would like to see this series offered to the public, please contact us at 238-0331 or email eileen@smartstartcc.org.

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