

Parenting classes can help every mom and dad navigate twists, turns that come with raising children

By Emily Moser

It's a time of happiness, hope ... and learning.

Lots of individuals and couples, when expecting a baby, enthusiastically enroll in prenatal classes to learn all they can about the birth and care of their newborn. It's an exciting time for parents, filled with the desire to give their child the best start possible.

As kids mature, the challenges of child rearing naturally change, though classes designed to help good parents be even more effective parents to their growing children seem to be less culturally accepted. In reality, parenting classes can help every mom and dad navigate the often tricky twists and turns of childhood, adolescence and the teen years.

Consider the feedback from a parent who attended a recent workshop on Internet safety and privacy. The parent was so impressed with the material that they noted, "I plan to contact our HR department to see if they'd bring this program to an employee brown bag."

One of the hurdles that may keep more parents from attending parenting classes is the stigma that such classes are only for so-called "bad" parents. Another way to look at such classes, though, is to consider that they actually are *not* about us as parents. Instead, they're about the common threads that run through children's behavior and learning the most effective ways to help kids make healthy choices and be the best people they can be.

Parenting classes also help parents and other caregivers adapt and be better informed in a rapidly changing world. Kids and families today face dynamic challenges. And parenting classes address a wide range of developmental stages and topics – among them, effective discipline, helping middle schoolers manage their homework, keeping kids safe on the Internet, bullying, alcohol and drug prevention, and how parents can maintain a healthy balance and make time for themselves amid a busy family and work life.

Parents do themselves a huge favor by staying current on such topics. In some cases, they may discover they are more knowledgeable than they think. In other cases, the information may be a good reminder or help strengthen their connections with their kids.

Parents who attended a workshop on positive parenting and strategies to keep kids free of alcohol and other drugs remarked on how valuable the information was.

Said one: "A parent can never hear this information too many times."

"Very interesting stuff. I feel more comfortable now talking about this with my children," another parent noted.

One of the biggest benefits of parenting classes is that they shine a light on the fact that families often share similar challenges – and that moms and dads don't have to go it alone. Parents can come together under one roof to talk about issues their families face and share solutions that work.

Before signing up for a parenting class, think about the setting in which you'd feel most comfortable. Would you benefit from a workshop the parents of your child's friends or classmates attend as well? Or, would you benefit from the anonymity of a class outside your community, where you might feel more comfortable sharing your experiences? Would you invite a friend to attend with you?

As the New Year approaches, if you've never been to a parenting class, resolve to sign up for one. If you've attended a class before, consider seeking out another - one designed to help address a new challenge you've encountered. It's a great way to start 2009 and continue strengthening family bonds.

Emily Moser is director of parenting programs at Oregon Partnership, a statewide nonprofit that provides substance abuse prevention education and treatment referral. For parenting resources, please contact Oregon Partnership at 503-244-5211, or visit www.orpartnership.org.