

# **PARENTS ARE WHERE THE STORY BEGINS!!**

**By Cindy Wendorff, Early Childhood Family Education Coordinator**

Stable, caring relationships are essential for healthy development. Children develop in an environment of relationships that begins in the home and includes extended family members and early care providers. Studies show that children who develop in a context of secure, trusting relationships are:

- better adjusted when they get to school,
- do better in school,
- stay in school longer,
- become more productive and healthier members of the workforce as adults and
- are better equipped to support the healthy development of the next generation.

Numerous scientific studies support the conclusion that providing supportive, responsive relationships as early in life as possible enhances future prosperity and can sometimes prevent or reverse the damaging effects of toxic stress (such as extreme poverty, abuse or neglect) with lifelong benefits for learning, behavior and health.

Psychologists call the relationship between child and parent “attachment.” The study of these relationships has shed light on the importance of the relationships between parent and child. Children form the basis for their future relationships on their relationship with their parent, as well as learning how to parent for the next generation.

The warmth that parents bring to their children’s lives starts at infancy. Parents of young children shower their kids with talk and physical touch. These behaviors show the child that others are sensitive of their needs and that parents can be trusted for emotional responsiveness. As a child grows older, he finds warmth in the parent-child relationship in other ways, specifically in receiving the fulfillment of his emotional needs, whether it is play or intimate conversation. Warmth in parenting can lead to a cooperative child, who is well-developed socially and emotionally.

One important task that occurs within this relationship is teaching and practicing self regulation or self control, which often is a way of keeping children on track in their own initiatives. Self regulation begins with:

- Physical regulation: Helping a child recognize physical warning signs that they are losing control, such as clenched fists, headache, stomachache.
- Emotional regulation: Teaching children to label their feelings. They can then “own” their emotions and begin to accept responsibility for them. It’s critical to help them find ways to calm down so they can move on to the final step:
- Cognitive regulation: Practicing problem solving and changing their behavior.

From early childhood, the home becomes a school. To parents of older children, this is obvious, as the dinner table might become the study table. However, parents’ roles in educating young children start as early as the infant years. Parents simultaneously educate their children while they strengthen the parent/child relationship. For example,

- reading books to your child will strengthen her linguistic development;
- playing active games will improve her motor skill development; and
- working on puzzles with your child will enhance her cognitive development.

Young children- and even parents- might mistakenly believe that they are just spending time with their family when they are actually developing useful life skills – social and cognitive. Parents are continually modeling their own self control and strengthening their relationship with their child!! A child’s story begins with his parents and extends for generations!!