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**FORMAÇÃO DE PAIS: UMA INICIATIVA FUNDAMENTAL EM SAÚDE PÚBLICA**  
**PARENT TRAINING: A CRITICAL PUBLIC HEALTH INITIATIVE**  
**FORMACIÓN DE PADRES: UNA INICIATIVA FUNDAMENTAL EN SALUD PÚBLICA**

Michele Knox<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Department of Psychiatry, University of Toledo College of Medicine and Life Sciences, Toledo, United States of América

Michele Knox - michele.knox@utoledo.edu



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**Corresponding Author**

*Michele Knox*  
3000 Arlington Ave,  
Toledo, OH 43614 - USA  
michele.knox@utoledo.edu

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## EDITORIAL

### PARENT TRAINING: A CRITICAL PUBLIC HEALTH INITIATIVE

Raising children is known to be an incredibly challenging yet enormously important undertaking. Children are highly sensitive to and affected by parents' behaviors and parental characteristics, such as parental warmth and hostility. The substantial impact of parenting on both child and adult outcomes for offspring has important implications for social and public health issues such as delinquency, substance abuse, violence, and crime. In addition, parenting has a major impact on youths' academic and occupational outcomes as well as social outcomes such as helping, sharing, and other kinds of prosocial behaviors. When we consider that parenting happens, for better or for worse, in every single family where children live, the enormity of the impact of this construct on entire populations becomes apparent. Despite this, parenting is rarely the focus of public health or educational initiatives. Parents simply are not taught how to parent. This is not because they do not need to be taught; in one study, 94.0% of parents reported at least one unmet need for advice, support, or guidance with parenting (Bethell et al., 2004). When we bear in mind the fact that the adverse effects of poor parenting persist for generations, the urgent need to address and improve parenting on a universal level becomes clear. This article makes the case that parent training programs are essential and can lead to substantial improvements on the individual, family, and societal levels.

Results of psychosocial research have recently been able to quantify the impact of parenting on child outcomes. In one study (Prevatt, 2003), for example, family risk factors, including family conflict, stress, mental illness, and poor parenting, primarily accounted for the variance in children's behavior problems (36%). On the other hand, family protective factors (family social support, cohesion, and moral focus) and positive parenting primarily accounted for the variance in children's adaptive behaviors (38%). Research on adolescents involved in criminal behavior found that high parental hostility coupled with low parental warmth predicts adolescent offending and aggression (Backman et al., 2021; Vaughan et al., 2021). With regard to psychopathic traits, parental hostility seems to contribute, while parental warmth appears to be preventive. These findings specify and amplify decades of research showing that families' risk and protective factors and parenting practices are highly predictive of youths' outcomes, both negative and positive.

With characteristics such as low parental warmth and hostility identified to be so clearly linked to poor outcomes, we are now able to identify targets for intervention and prevention. Can we improve parental warmth? Can we reduce parental hostility? We absolutely can. Parenting programs often address parental attributions that may lead to hostility. For example, parents can be taught that tantrums are developmentally normal and not indicators of manipulation or spite (Silva, 2011). Parents can be helped to understand that children are not born knowing how to behave and to frame "bad" behavior as mistakes, indicating a need for patient guidance and teaching. Parental warmth and nurturing can be bolstered with information about how warm, reciprocal parent-child interactions relate to healthy brain development. Programs can show parents how to engage in nurturing behaviors with children at different stages of development.

Although much research has focused broadly on parenting styles, research on parenting has advanced significantly in recent decades (Lee, Daniels, & Kissinger, 2006) to precisely identify specific parenting behaviors that lead to positive or poor outcomes for children. With effects pared down to the behavioral level, very specific targets for parenting programs have been identified. Parent intervention specialists can now point to which behaviors need to be taught and link them to which outcomes families need to achieve. For example, parents can be taught how to set clear, developmentally appropriate limits/rules for children's behaviors. They can be taught to monitor and reinforce children's rule-compliant behavior. Parents can be taught to use natural and logical consequences, such as leaving a play situation when the child is not following the rules or removing a toy that is played with roughly.

Parent training programs utilizing such methods are now widely recognized as evidence-based methods of prevention of child maltreatment and child externalizing behavior problems (Weber et al., 2019). Parent programs can be successfully and effectively implemented in person or virtually. Results of a meta-analysis of studies examining online parenting programs indicate such programs can provide substantive benefits for parents and their children (Spencer, Topham, & King, 2020). Given the significant cost to families and societies of poor parenting and its many negative outcomes, it is imperative that we scale up evidence-based parenting programs to make them universally available. Parents want and need to be taught to parent, and we now have the methods to do just that, so let's get to it.

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