

## Parenting



One Tough Job

# Expert guidance might benefit parents

*(Editor's note: This is the second in a series of five stories regarding National Child Abuse Prevention Month and the services available in McKean County to help parents through what the McKean County Collaborative Board calls "the toughest job you'll love" — parenthood. Five protective factors have been identified to reduce the risk of abuse and neglect. This series identifies and explores those factors.)*

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Era Reporter

Parents know their children best, but could benefit from expert guidance in getting through the difficult developmental stages that come between birth and the teen years.

The Family Centers offer a program on "Parents as Teachers," which helps parents understand early childhood development from birth through age 5

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through home visits.

"I teach them about child development," explained Gladys LeCourt-Pelka, family development specialist with the Bradford Family Center. "I teach the parents how to teach the child.

"I teach them it's normal for your child to be waking up every three hours. It's very important that the parents learn about the development of the child, what is normal and what isn't," she said.

"It's very helpful for the parents because children don't come with directions," LeCourt-Pelka said. "Everybody gets frustrated and that can lead to child abuse."

The Family Centers offer play groups where parents can meet and share ideas and tips on discipline while the children play.

"It's helpful for parents to bounce ideas off other parents and be ready for what comes next," LeCourt-Pelka said.

She explained that the trials of parenthood change as the child grows up, but the Family Centers have programs that address several age groups.

"We have the Incredible Years workshop for ages 2 to 8," explained Lee Sizemore, director of the Family Centers. "Even the most vigilant parent gets stuck."

"I like to call them the incredibly stressful years," said Sherry Rodgers, a parent who has benefited from the programs the centers offers. "When you start off (as a parent) it's almost like you can have a dictatorship because you can rule the household, but then it has to turn into a democracy.

"When they're little you can tell them what to do and for the most part they do it. After that, sometimes time-outs don't work," Rodgers said, laughing. "I've found that compromise works."

She described what she's learned in the workshops and how she's put it to use at home, telling her child, "If you practice your saxophone until 6 o'clock, you can stay up until 9:30."

Referring to the workshop, Rodgers said, "They've really taught us a lot there."

"Once they get to be older, we have the Strengthening Families program," LeCourt-Pelka said. It's for parents and

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kids in grades 5 and 6. "They're not quite children and they're not quite adults, we call them the youth. They're dealing with peer pressure."

Giving an example of some of the things participants learn in the seven-week program, LeCourt-Pelka said, "I work with those children to learn that your parents are there to help you, not work against you."

The workshop is about different stages of the youth's life — "friends, family, discipline, rules, consequences" — and it teaches the parents something too. "The child is learning and you've got to be patient with them," LeCourt-Pelka said.

Duane Wolfe, director of McKean County Children and Youth Services, said he's seen success from the programs in helping families develop routines.

"You will eventually develop a pattern or routine with (children) so you can plan the rest of your day around it," Wolfe said. "That's where they've been really successful with these programs. If (the families) don't get that routine, it's just chaos. As they work through (the workshops) and that pattern develops, it makes a huge impact."

Kim Martin, director of McKean County Women, Infant and Children nutrition program, explained that program stresses spending time together.

"One of the things WIC tries to do is to get everyone to sit down as a family at mealtime, turn off the TV and just talk to one another," Martin said.