

STARTING POINTS

MEETING THE NEEDS OF OUR YOUNGEST CHILDREN



TWO PROGRAMS THAT IMPROVE PARENTS' CHILDREARING SKILLS

Imaginative programs in Oregon and Texas demonstrate that parent education and support can be offered to the general population as well as to specific groups and can improve parents' childrearing skills.

OREGON — BIRTH TO THREE

Since 1978, the nonprofit organization Birth To Three has brought new parents in Eugene, Oregon, together to share experiences, study early child development, form a support network, and learn about community resources. Programs are community- or school-based and are run by professional staff members assisted by volunteers.

More than 10,000 families have benefited from this program, which is offered to all families—there are groups for single parents, working parents, and parents with multiple births. A program aimed at pregnant teenagers and teenage parents includes weekly group meetings, home visits, crisis assistance, and life-skills training. All parents have access to a resource hotline, newsletter, and posters; a weekly parenting column also appears in the local newspaper.

TEXAS — AVANCE

A widely acclaimed family support and education program begun in Texas in 1973 serves Mexican American families. Each year Avance serves 2,000 families with young children in Houston,

San Antonio, and the Rio Grande Valley. Avance operates in public housing centers, in elementary schools, and through its family service centers. Its Parent-Child Education Program conducts home visits by trained staff members (many of them former participants), presents weekly classes on child growth and development, and disseminates information about community services, English classes, and high school and employment preparation courses.

Avance provides free child care so that mothers can attend classes; when their children are older, some mothers serve as volunteer aides at the child care center, thus learning more about child development. Avance staff members, most of whom have some college education in relevant disciplines, emphasize individual attention to the child and support for the mother. Avance also involves fathers: staff encourage fathers to participate at the centers and connect fathers with job training initiatives, parenting education, and social support networks.

Evaluations show that Avance programs improved families' ability to provide an emotionally stimulating and nurturing environment for their young children, positively influenced mothers' childrearing attitudes and knowledge, and expanded mothers' use of community resources. ●

THE REPORT OF THE CARNEGIE TASK FORCE ON
MEETING THE NEEDS OF YOUNG CHILDREN

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