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Getting out the vote for kids

Advocates for children and families are active this year in a nationwide movement to get under-represented people to the polls

By Heather World

WHO VOTES?

- Low-income young people are least likely to vote.
- Rich white people are most likely to vote.
- QUESTION: Why do you think local, state, and national policies reflect the needs of older, richer, whiter people in the United States?
- ANSWER: VOTING IS POWER!

—Flyer by the California Partnership

This flyer, (above) produced by a coalition of organizations advocating for low-income families, is just one part of this year's massive national movement to bring under-represented groups to the polls. California organizations serving and advocating for children and families are getting involved with projects aiming to persuade parents and others who care about children to register and vote.

"Politicians respond to who they think will vote!" says Maria Luz Torre, organizer for Parent Voices in San Francisco.

"The whole social fabric of our life is dependent on the priorities of our government, and those are determined by the people who participate," said Paul Miller, executive director of Kidango, a Bay Area child development program.

Elected officials make decisions about funding and rules for child care, education, health care, housing, welfare, foster care, and more.

PARENT VOICES: PEER-TO-PEER OUTREACH

Parent Voices tries to show parents they make a difference if they vote, says Michelle Stewart, a coordinator for the Contra Costa chapter.

"Generally speaking, they are so overwhelmed day-to-day, they do not participate," she says. "The goal is to get them to take the initiative and be involved."

This fall, the group will set up voter-registration tables at child care programs serving low-income families and register voters. They'll try to have a parent from the program at the table: "Often we find peer-to-peer contact most effective," Stewart says.

And for "single parents who don't vote because they have so many other pressing responsibilities," says San Francisco Parent Voices organizer Dru Howard, the group encourages them to vote by mail with an absentee ballot.

CALIFORNIA PARTNERSHIP: KNOCKING ON DOORS

California Partnership has been training member organizations to get more people to vote. The groups register voters either in their own membership or by knocking on doors and signing up voters at community events, says Southern California organizer Alicia Lepe. Member organizations report back on how many voters they've registered and what methods work best. Near election day, the groups will go back to people they registered and encourage them to get out and vote.

MOBILIZE THE IMMIGRANT VOTE: TRAINING LEADERS

Immigrants who have become citizens can vote, but they face extra hurdles that keep many away from the polls, says Larisa Casillas, campaign coordinator for Mobilize the Immigrant Vote California, a project of Northern California Citizenship Project.

"There is general distrust of the system itself," she says. Many question whether their vote will count. The bureaucratic language of the ballot is difficult to understand and translations aren't always available; unfamiliar voting methods—punch card, lever, touch-screen—can be intimidating. Then immigrant communities "are often ignored, because of their low voter turnout."

To help, Mobilize the Immigrant Vote plans to produce a voter's rights palm card as well as a longer voter guide on ballot questions. The group is also providing a series of all-day, intensive trainings on election work for community leaders across California. Participants learn how to show immigrants the potential impact of their vote by linking political issues with their daily lives.

Giving people reasons to vote

Registering voters is only the first step in increasing voter participation. Educating people about issues is important in motivating them to vote, says Oakland Parent Voices organizer Kim Kruckel: "They become a part of the process when they see how they are directly affected."

"Most people don't learn by reading," says Paul Miller, director of Kidango. So Kidango carves out time from parent meetings to discuss political issues or candidates' positions.

Crystal Stairs, a child care resource and referral center in Los Angeles, hosts quarterly brown-bag lunches on candidates and issues for its staff. Crystal Stairs also includes political education in its provider training, for example, describing the budget process and how the budget affects small businesses and child care funding.

Learning about the issues leads to more participation: Last year after a policy workshop, Public Affairs Director Sydney Kamlager noticed a 25 percent increase in calls from parents and providers seeking election information, and another 10 to 15 percent increase in invitations to speak about political participation at other events.

PTA: WORKING THROUGH SCHOOLS

The California state Parent Teacher Association targets another notoriously underrepresented voting bloc—youth.

Cecelia Mansfield, director of legislation, says the organization encourages high school PTAs to register students who will be 18 by the election—and their parents. The PTA encourages local chapters to use back-to-school nights and other events. The state organization helps local PTAs organize candidate forums and directs them to websites or organizations that provide impartial information.

"We need to encourage voters to take advantage of the opportunity they have at an early age so they'll be lifelong voters," she said. This year California's secretary of state will send voter registration applications with high school and college diplomas and start a program to train student poll workers.

How to:

Register and vote

- 800-345-VOTE
- www.easyvoter.org/California (register online here or at www.myvotecounts.org)
- www.calvoter.org, 530-750-7650

Bring children's issues into the campaigns

- Children's Advocate article: www.4children.org/news/902aae.htm (English and Spanish)
- Questions to ask candidates www.kidsandpolitics.org
- Finding or organizing candidate forums
Your local League of Women Voters
(in the white pages)

Find information on candidates and ballot measures

- Easy Voter Guide, 415-454-6500, www.easyvoter.org/California (English and Spanish)
- Children's Defense Fund scorecard on members of Congress, 202-628-8787, www.cdfactioncouncil.org/scorecard/2003.pdf
- Children's Advocacy Institute report card on members of the California legislature, www.caichildlaw.org, click on "advocacy," then on "legislation"

(more resources on page 4)



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10 Steps to voting power

By Jessine Foss

If you work in an agency serving families and children, or if you're active in a community organization, you're an important part of families' lives—so you can be most effective at persuading them to vote. How to go about it? Here are some tips from Head Start, Family Support America, and others.

1 PLAN YOUR VOTER PARTICIPATION EFFORTS. How will you recruit volunteers? Get supplies? Pay for any costs? How can you use a get-out-the vote campaign to develop parent or community leadership? What organizations can you collaborate with?

2 WORK WITH ELECTION OFFICIALS. Your county elections office can provide: a list of polling places, information about having your agency serve as a polling place, even a mock election booth. To register voters, call the California Secretary of State's office to get cards and fill out a voter registration card distribution form (see Resources). Ask the Secretary of State's office or your county elections office how to get approved to distribute absentee ballot applications.

3 REGISTER NEW VOTERS (by October 18). Make voter registration forms available in multiple languages. Pick a day to register everyone who comes into the building. Add voter registration to your organization's intake process. Register voters at community events, grocery stores, sports events, shelters, and bus stops—or go door-to-door. Offer to mail in completed voter registration forms (give the person the receipt at the bottom and send forms in within three days).

Encourage people to sign a pledge promising to vote. Keep contact information for the people you register—to contact them again before the election and to show candidates the number of voters concerned with children's issues.

4 GIVE PEOPLE REASONS TO VOTE by educating them on how the issues affect their families. Find out about ballot measures and candidates' positions on children's issues (see Resources, p.2). Find out what people in your community are most concerned about—and show them how candidates and ballot measures would affect those issues. Invite candidates and speakers on ballot measures to a forum to talk about your issues—or go as a group and ask questions at a forum organized by a different group. The League of Women voters often holds election forums.

5 BUILD CONFIDENCE by providing opportunities for people to learn about voting and discuss how election issues relate to their daily lives. Hold a workshop on how and why to vote. Set up a mock election booth at a forum or in your organization so that people can practice voting. Ask participants to commit to acting on what they've learned.

6 INFORM NEW VOTERS AND OTHERS ABOUT THE ELECTION. Put up a sign with key election-related dates. Provide election information in multiple languages: information on candidates and ballot measures, sample questions for candidates, instructions for using voting machines.

7 PROMOTE ABSENTEE BALLOTS by making absentee ballot applications available in multiple languages, reminding people to apply (between October 4 and 26), and reminding them again to send their ballot in (so it will be received before 8 pm on election day). If you distribute absentee ballot applications, offer to mail them in.

8 KEEP UP THE MOMENTUM. The week before the election, remind everyone three times to vote—in person or by phone or postcard. Ask if they have made a plan for making time to vote. Have people wear "I vote" or "I will vote" stickers. Get a list of community polling places with maps showing who votes where.

9 MAKE VOTING SOCIAL. Have a party for people to fill out their sample ballots together. On election day, organize rides and child care and go to the polls as a group.

10 ENCOURAGE PEOPLE TO STAY ACTIVE after the elections and participate in advocacy efforts—such as letter-writing campaigns, lobby days, and legislative visits.



Keep it legal

Nonprofits can register voters (as long as they register everyone who is willing and eligible), develop and send out election information, and use agency vehicles and staff to transport voters to the polls. But it all has to be nonpartisan—you can't do, say, or wear anything that supports a particular candidate or issue.

You can say...

"Register to vote because:

- "Public policy is decided at the polls. Take a position on health care, nutrition, and other issues affecting families."
- "You can have an impact on the decisions affecting your life."
- "Budget cuts are reducing services provided by this agency and many others. If you care about housing and child care, register to vote today."

But you can't say...

"Register to vote to:

- "Support family values. Vote for Smith."
- "Stop the reactionary Republican Congress. Elect Democrats."
- "Budget cuts are reducing services provided by this program. Let candidates know you won't take it anymore."

Because of its federal funding source, Head Start programs cannot use agency resources, facilities, or staff time to register voters or conduct voter participation activities (see resources).

Sources: Family Support America, National Head Start Association.

Resources

Election officials

- Secretary of State, 916-653-3214, <http://myvotecounts.org>;
www.mivotacuenta.org
- Contact info for county elections offices,
www.ss.ca.gov/elections/elections_d.htm

Tips for voter participation efforts

- Family Support America, 312-338-0900,
www.familysupportamerica.org/content/policy/articles/vote_reg.htm
- National Head Start Association, 703-739-0875,
www.nhsa.org/advocacy/advocacy_vtk.htm
- NAACP, 877-NAACP-98,
www.naacp.org/work/voter/register_a_voter.shtml

Sample voter education workshops

- Easy Voter, 415-454-6500,
<http://easyvoter.org/california/resources/workshopoutline.pdf>
- Northern California Citizenship Project, 415-621-4808,
www.immigrantvoice.org/ncv/index.html

Questions on the November ballot

PROPOSITION 1A — PROTECTION OF LOCAL GOVERNMENT REVENUES



WWW.PERFECTWORLD.ORG

This measure is the result of a budget deal between Governor Schwarzenegger and organizations representing cities and counties. It would prohibit the state government from taking money from local city and county funds in an effort to balance the state budget. The state would not be able to

change the distribution of sales and property taxes, or make other changes that would alter the budget of local governments. If this measure is passed, it would go into effect beginning in 2006-2007.

ARGUMENTS FOR

“Cities need local money for services for their communities,” says Megan Taylor of the League of California Cities, for libraries, emergency care, parks, and law enforcement. But each year the state government collects \$1.3 billion from local governments and another \$5.2 billion specifically from local property taxes. When the state “picks the pockets of local government, it makes it impossible to plan on expenditures for the fiscal year.”

- Local funding will remain local, to be used for community services and infrastructure.

- This measure will not raise taxes.
- “The state needs to learn some fiscal accountability,” says Taylor. Rather than treating local funds as “an ATM,” the state will only be able to borrow local money in the future.

Supporters: League of California Cities (916-658-8228), California State Association of Counties, California Special Districts Association

ARGUMENTS AGAINST

More budget crises are likely in the future, because the state’s current sources of revenue basically don’t provide enough to pay for yearly expenditures. In future budget crises, Proposition 1A would “limit the [state’s] flexibility” with funding, says Jean Ross, director of the California Budget Project.

- Areas of the budget that are not protected by this measure or other mea-

asures would be cut the most. That includes many programs important to children and families—health care, housing, child welfare, and most social services.

- Current laws on property taxes and sales taxes give local governments an incentive to “chase after big-box stores to boost revenues,” rather than building needed housing, says Ross. This measure would “lock [local governments] into a system that most observers agree doesn’t work.”

NOTE: Although Ross explained why some people oppose Prop. 1A, the California Budget Project itself neither supports nor opposes this measure.

Opponent: Carole Migden, chair, State Board of Equalization (800-400-7115)

—Katie Quach

PROPOSITION 61 — CHILDREN’S HOSPITAL BOND ACT



SOUTHEAST MISSOURI HOSPITAL

This measure would allow the state to sell \$750 million worth of bonds to provide grants for improvements and expansions of California’s children’s hospitals. Twenty percent of the funds would be made available for the five University of California children’s hospitals, while 80 percent would be earmarked for other qualifying children’s hospitals in California.

ARGUMENTS FOR

“There’s such a need for services provided at children’s hospitals,” said Charity Bracy, vice president of the California Children’s Hospital Association. “We get the kids that are the sickest of the sick.”

Supporters say:

- Children’s hospitals need access to the latest medical technology so children with life-threatening illnesses, such as cancer, leukemia, and diabetes, can be treated effectively.
- Funds would be used to buy new medical equipment, expand chil-

dren’s hospital emergency rooms, and make more room for seriously ill and injured children.

Supporters include: California Children’s Hospitals Association (858-974-1644)

ARGUMENTS AGAINST

No organizations or individuals had filed statements of opposition to this measure by press time. However, any opposition would probably be based on the cost of bond measures to taxpayers. When the state sells bonds, it’s borrowing money. When the bond is due, the state has to pay back the money—with interest—out of the general fund.

—Andrea Hernandez

VERSIÓN EN ESPAÑOL EN LA PÁGINA 12

PROPOSITION 63 — EXPANSION AND FUNDING OF MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES. INCOME TAX ON MILLIONAIRES.



WWW.RAISINGDEAFKIDS.ORG

This measure would provide an estimated \$680 million in 2005-06, and more in future years, to expand services for mentally ill children, as well as adults and seniors, and to develop new prevention, early intervention, and education programs. A new commission would oversee programs and spending. Funds would come from an additional 1 percent tax on annual income over \$1 million.

ARGUMENTS FOR

Rusty Selix, executive director of the California Council of Community Mental Health Agencies, says that for children, the current system seems to be “fail first”—mental health services are usually available only after children enter foster care, special education, or juvenile detention. This initiative would provide early intervention and prevention—which could reduce the need for more costly programs later on.

Supporters say:

- This measure would make sure that mentally ill children receive care even if their insurance doesn’t pay for it, or they have no insurance.
- Mentally ill homeless people could get off the streets and receive treatment.
- In the 1960s, California closed mental hospitals and promised to fund community mental health services. Proponents say the state hasn’t kept that promise.
- Because of large federal tax cuts, millionaires can afford to pay more state taxes.

Supporters include: Campaign for Mental Health (916-557-1166) California Psychiatric Association, California Healthcare Association, California Teachers Association, California Police Chiefs Association, California Council of Community Mental Health Agencies

ARGUMENTS AGAINST

“This initiative says, ‘If you reside in California and you’re a millionaire, we’re going to make you responsible for mental health care,’” says Larry McCarthy, president of the California Taxpayers Association. This is unfair to wealthy residents, who, he says, boost California’s economic activity and state revenues.

Opponents say:

- California already relies too much financially on millionaires, who make up only a small segment of taxpayers.
- Because of high taxes on wealthy people, many are deciding to leave for neighboring states with lower taxes.
- This tax hike would hurt entrepreneurs who are starting companies but still filing taxes as personal income—instead, California should be encouraging small businesses.
- Mental health care should be placed back in the hands of volunteer church groups rather than “ineffectual” state programs, says Church of Scientology spokesperson Edward Parkin.

Opponents include: Howard Jarvis Taxpayers Association (916-444-9950), California Taxpayers Association, Citizens for a Healthy California, Church of Scientology

—Andrea Hernandez

PROPOSITION 66 — LIMITING THE “THREE STRIKES” LAW. HARSHER PUNISHMENT FOR SEX CRIMES



Intended to prevent crime and keep repeat offenders off the street, the current “Three Strikes” law jails criminals for 25 years to life after they commit three felonies. This measure would amend the current law, giving the longer sentences only to repeat offenders whose “third strike” is a violent or serious felony such as murder, rape, or kidnapping. It would apply retroactively to people already sentenced under the “Three Strikes” law. This proposition would also enforce harsher punishment for sex crimes against children.

ARGUMENTS FOR

“Unfortunately the way ‘Three Strikes’ was designed to begin with, it (included) a whole lot of minor crimes, especially on the ‘third strike,’” says Leo McElroy, consultant to Californians Against Violent Crime. “This law was not intended to put people in jail for life for stealing a pizza.”

Supporters say:

- People who commit minor crimes on their third offense—shoplifting or drug possession, for example—are being unfairly imprisoned for 25 years to life. The “Three Strikes” law takes people away from their communities and separates parents from their children for minor crimes.
- It costs taxpayers millions of dollars to keep minor offenders behind bars for many years.
- According to a study by the Justice Policy Institute, crime in California counties that rarely use the “Three

Strikes” law is decreasing more than in counties that use the law frequently.

- The measure would strengthen one of the original law’s weak spots by increasing penalties for sex offenders.

Supporters include: Citizens Against Violent Crime (866-3-STRIKES), American Civil Liberties Union of Southern California, Center for Children of Incarcerated Parents, Mental Health Association in California

ARGUMENTS AGAINST

“It’s no more than a wolf in sheep’s clothing,” says Lance Corcoran, executive vice president of the California Correctional Peace Officers Association. “It’s going to put about 20,000 convicted felons on the street within approximately 120 days if the measure is successful.”

Opponents say:

- The amended law will not discourage crime as well as the current “Three Strikes” law, which has effectively kept career criminals off the streets.
- Over 20,000 second and third strike inmates would be eligible to be immediately released.
- Because the law is retroactive, millions of dollars would be spent to reprocess and re-sentence offenders.
- According to FBI statistics, California’s crime rate has decreased by twice the national average since voters approved the “Three Strikes” law in 1994.

Opponents include: California Correctional Peace Officers Association (888-556-5150), California District Attorneys Association, Californians United for Public Safety, Crime Victims United of California

—Andrea Hernandez

VERSIÓN EN ESPAÑOL EN LA PÁGINA 13

PROPOSITION 67 — TAX FOR EMERGENCY HEALTH CARE



SOUTHEAST MISSOURI HOSPITAL

This measure would increase funding for emergency health care, including improvements in paramedic and emergency room care and the 911 phone system and pay for on-call doctors. Funds would come from a tax increase of 3 percent on all telephone

use and an additional 50-cent monthly increase on residential phone bills, as well as some funds from tobacco taxes and from fines from criminal and traffic violations.

ARGUMENTS FOR

“California is approaching 7 million uninsured. The emergency room is therefore used for primary [health] care,” says Peter Warren, spokesperson for Coalition to Preserve Emergency Care, an organization representing firefighters, nurses, physicians, and others. “Passage of this bill would ensure that access to high-quality care remains available.”

- In the past decade, approximately 60 emergency hospital rooms have closed due to lack of funding. This

has created overcrowding and longer wait times in other emergency rooms.

- In the current 911 system, calls made from cell phones cannot be tracked. Improvements in this system could save lives.
- Improved emergency care is important during emergencies like earthquakes or fires.

Supporters include: Coalition to Preserve Emergency Care (213-630-1126), California Medical Association, California Healthcare Association, California Primary Care Association

ARGUMENTS AGAINST

“Proposition 67 is simply a raid on a convenient taxation target to fund services that have nothing to do with

phone use,” says Reed Royalty of the Orange County Taxpayers Association. “We should not raise our own telephone taxes to fund services that are vaguely defined.”

- The amount of the tax on cell phone charges remains unclear.
- The tax rate on telephone service is already higher than taxes on other goods and services.
- The way funds will be spent remains vague.

Opponents include: The Orange County Taxpayer’s Association (949-240-6226), telephone and cell phone companies such as Cingular, Verizon, T-Mobile and SBC, Californians to Stop the Phone Tax, California Chamber of Commerce, California State Sheriffs Association

—Katie Quach

PROPOSITION 72 — EMPLOYER-PAID HEALTH INSURANCE



SOUTHEAST MISSOURI HOSPITAL

Last year California passed a law (known as “SB-2”) requiring medium and large employers to provide health insurance for their employees or pay into a state fund that would insure them. By 2006, employers with more than 200 workers would have to pro-

vide health insurance for employees and their dependents. By 2007, employers with 50 to 199 workers would be required to provide health insurance, but only for employees. Prop. 72 was created by people who want to repeal SB-2.

A “yes” vote means you want to keep SB-2, you want to require employers to provide health insurance. A “no” vote means you want to repeal SB-2, you don’t want to require employers to provide health insurance.

ARGUMENTS FOR

Passage of this measure would provide health insurance for 1.1 million people. Approximately “300,000 of those who would benefit from Prop. 72 would be children,” says Jessica Rothaar of the advocacy group Health Access. With the current rise in health

care costs, more people are losing health insurance.

- Health insurance would become available to under-insured groups, such as retail and service workers and immigrant communities.
- Coverage currently offered through employers would be protected.
- Uninsured visits to emergency rooms cost taxpayers \$4.6 billion a year. If more people have insurance, those costs will be reduced.
- We would get a “healthier, more productive, less transient workforce,” says Anthony Wright, executive director of Health Access.

Supporters include: Health Access California (510-873-8787), Latino Issues Forum, California Medical Association, California Nurses Association, Catholic Charities, California Labor Federation

ARGUMENTS AGAINST

“The rising number of uninsured is a problem,” acknowledges Dr. James Knight, spokesperson for the No on 72 organization and former president of the

San Diego County Medical Society. But the rising cost of health insurance would mean businesses would have to cut back services or lay off workers in order to afford the mandatory health insurance.

- There are no cost controls on health insurance in California, so insurance premiums could continue to rise dramatically.
- The cost of providing insurance might force smaller businesses, including non-profit organizations, to lay off workers or even close.
- Companies with 200 or more employees would pay \$5,718 per worker. Mid-sized companies would pay \$2,276 per worker.

Opponents include: No on 72 (916-443-3354) California Chamber of Commerce, California Restaurant Association, California Retailers Association, California Taxpayers Association

—Katie Quach

“You can’t help it if you’re mad”

Tips for helping children learn to manage their anger

By Claudia Miller



WWW.ISTOCKPHOTO.COM

When told that they can't have any ice cream, three siblings react very differently. One gets angry and hits her brother. Another screams "I hate you!" The third stomps around, slams doors, and throws his toys.

While anger is a basic human emotion, many adults aren't sure how to teach children to handle angry feelings. Parenting experts offer tips for helping children learn anger management skills.

Resources

For parents:

- **Angry Child: Regaining Control When Your Child is Out of Control**, by Tim Murphy, offers tips for helping children control anger. \$13.50. Summary and resources online at www.theangrychild.com.
- **Resources for parents**, from the Parenting Leadership Institute, are online at www.parentleaders.org/articles.html
- **Get Your Angries Out**, from Talk, Trust, and Feel Therapeutics, has information on anger management for parents, teachers, and children at www.angriesout.com
- **"Helping Young Children Deal with Anger,"** article on the Internet at <http://ceep.crc.uiuc.edu/eecearchive/digests/1998/marion97.html>

For children:

- **When Sophie Gets Angry—Really, Really Angry**, by Molly Bang
- **I Am So Angry, I Could Scream**, by Laura Fox

Acknowledge your child's anger

Let children know that it's OK to feel angry sometimes and that they shouldn't be afraid of their anger, says Madeline Meyer Riley, an Oakland marriage and family therapist. "You can't help it if you're mad, but you can help what you do about it," she adds.

Sometimes, just stating, "I can see that you're really mad," can diffuse the angry situation, says Stacy Kaiser, a mother of two school-age children and a Van Nuys marriage and family therapist. "With my children, giving them a hug or just touching them lightly may sometimes end the angry feelings and they'll often just break down into tears," she adds. Adults should also think about whether hunger or tiredness are making things worse.

Stop inappropriate behavior

Stop children when they are hitting others, shouting, throwing toys, slamming doors, or doing anything else that your family or child care center doesn't allow.

Many parenting experts suggest using time-outs or separating kids who are fighting. "Tell the child, '[You] need some time to cool down, and we can talk about the situation in a couple minutes when you're ready to talk,'" says Laura Parra, clinical social worker at the Venice Family Clinic.

On the other hand, Patty Wipfler of the Parenting Leadership Institute advises parents to stay with their children when they're angry. "Don't get involved in arguing with them," she says, "just be there." Once when her son got angry over ice cream in a store, "he burst into tears and was thrashing around in the cart. He kept telling me that I was a bad mommy," she says. Wipfler

left the store and sat with her son. When he told her she didn't love him, she replied quietly, "I'm sorry you feel that way, but I'm not going to get the big ice cream today." Eventually, she says, he "got around to being a reasonable person again. I know that it was really important for me to stay with him and listen to him during that time."

Help children handle angry feelings

Younger children may not be able to tell you why they're mad, says Parra. "Their behavior is their way of communicating to you. You can help them by giving them the words they need to use, such as, 'I'm really mad that I can only have one cookie.'" Soon, the child will learn to use those words instead of "I hate you" or "You're mean," she adds.

You can also teach children to count to ten before saying hurtful words, take deep breaths, or write down their feelings in a journal. You can ask younger children to draw "their mad feelings," says Meyer Riley. Encourage children "stuck" in an angry mood to run around outside for 10 minutes, punch a pillow, jump up and down 10 times, pound some Play-doh, or stomp around their room for a few minutes.

When all is calm, teach problem-solving skills

"It's nearly impossible to make any progress talking to someone who is furious," says Stacy Kaiser of Friends of the Family in Van Nuys. "When my two daughters get angry at each other over the television, I'll tell them that the television stays off until they calm down," she said. "At that point, we can talk about the problem. The television stays off until we figure it out."

"Often children need help thinking of solutions," says German Walteros, early intervention coordinator for San Francisco's *Instituto Familiar de la Raza*. "[But] if a parent or teacher recognizes [a child's] angry feelings and then provides some alternatives, the child feels empowered," he adds. For example, a child may want all the green crayons. The teacher might tell him that, while another child is using green, he can have three red crayons or wait until the green one is available.

Adults can help older children find ways to share and take turns with siblings and playmates. "After a thousand times, children do learn that having a temper tantrum, hitting, or shoving doesn't really work, it just gets them into more trouble," says Walteros.

Different families will teach different approaches he adds: "Culture does play a [role] in how families raise their children, so people need to take into account their own family history and circumstances and apply the advice of the experts in a modified way."

Role model appropriate behavior

Children often learn to deal with anger, disappointment, and frustration by watching how their parents, child care providers, and teachers react when they get angry. Parents can model good anger management skills by using "I" statements instead of shouting—for example, "I'm angry that you hit your brother," or "I'm really frustrated that the juice was spilled."

If a parent or teacher loses their cool, they can tell the child they made a mistake by yelling—next time, they're going to try to count to 10 to calm down or take a walk instead.

When necessary, seek professional help

Experts say parents should consider talking to a professional—such as a therapist, religious advisor, or teacher—if they feel very angry when their child gets angry or if their child shows a very inappropriate response to anger, wants to hurt him or herself, lacks empathy (if an older child), or shows no remorse. "If the problem is ongoing for the parent or the child, it can help to talk to somebody outside the family," says Kaiser.



When support knocks at the door

Home visitors give new parents someone to turn to in times of stress

By Melia Franklin

"I'm a single mom," says Amber Vigil, 24, a resident of Del Paso Heights in Sacramento. "My stress level is high as a result." Sometimes, when the kids get sick, the refrigerator breaks, and the money runs out, working full time as a medical assistant and parenting her two boys—Matthew, five, and Joshua, three—can seem overwhelming.

Luckily, Vigil has support—at her doorstep. Since Matthew was three months old, she has participated in Sacramento County's Birth and Beyond program, which offers home visiting and other services to parents of children under five, through family resource centers. Families participate for an average of eight months, some up to three or four years. Visits are two to four times a month, based on the needs of the family.

County to neighborhood

"We have made a major commitment to home visiting as a child-abuse-prevention strategy," says county supervisor Roger Dickinson, whose district includes Del Paso Heights. The county uses state social service funds to pay for Birth and Beyond; Sacramento First Five has added \$10-15 million.

FRCs provide a "neighborhood base...where parents can go and see other families," Dickinson adds. "That can reduce the isolation at-risk families often experience."

"Right here with you"

Vigil connected to Birth and Beyond through Mutual Assistance Network of Del Paso Heights (MAN), one of nine FRCs offering the program, which hires home visitors from the neighborhood. "Only residents can really understand their community," says Wilmer Brown, MAN's director of family services. And the money they earn "stays in the community."

Mona Shields, a former MAN home visitor, agrees: "I personally can understand where (the parents) are at. I was a TANF [Temporary Assistance for Needy Families] receiver. They see me in the grocery store. I can say, 'I'm right here with you. I've been through what you've been through.'"

Shields and other home visitors receive extensive training and work with a team leader, a licensed counselor. They can also bring in specialists from MAN to address mental health, child development, nutrition, employment, and other needs.

At age two, Joshua, Vigil's younger son, "wasn't speaking at all—'baa baa' and 'maa maa' was all he was saying," she recalls. Her home visitor noticed the problem and called in MAN's development specialists. They arranged for a state-funded speech therapist to work with Joshua at child care, so Vigil wouldn't have to miss work for appointments. "Now my son can speak better than most children his age!" she reports.

Helping parents succeed

With each new family, "we start where that family is and move on from there," says Donna Bell-Dent, team leader for Birth and Beyond at MAN. "We ask: 'How can we go into this home and help them succeed?'"—whether it's helping a parent complete Medi-Cal forms, understand stages of child development, or get a GED.

"If I needed something, she was right there," says Vigil of her home visitor. Once Vigil's refrigerator broke and all the food spoiled. "I called [my home visitor]—within a day, she got someone to donate a fridge and delivered it to my house."

In addition to helping with immediate needs, a major goal is "helping families be self-sufficient," says Bell-Dent—"showing a mom how to catch a bus and taking it with them so they can do it themselves the next time." Adds Vigil: "They help me if I get stuck, but they give me the opportunity to be the independent person that I am."



SHELLEY BALLA, BIRTH AND BEYOND

Birth and Beyond helps parents find the resources they need to care for their children.

Trusting relationships

The first months with a new parent, says Shields, "we're building up relationships." Little by little, the mom "starts talking to me more, asking for more information."

At first home visitors do more listening than talking. When Vigil walked into MAN's office one late afternoon, "they were all busy, but Lisa [a home visitor] came out...to sit down with me," she recalls. "She didn't rush me. She took the time...to find out what I wanted to know."

"She didn't treat me like a client, but rather as a person," adds Vigil. "A lot of programs are very formal. [Lisa] helps me interact with my children and she has a great personality. I didn't feel like I was being interviewed every time. If I was too busy to call her, she called me."

"Our home visitors become very enmeshed in their families' lives," confirms Bell-Dent. One home visitor stayed with a mom through childbirth "because the mom was Spanish-speaking and had no one to translate for her."

The research shows

- The U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention reported in 2003 that "home visitations by trained personnel play an effective role in the reduction of child maltreatment, including abuse and/or neglect."
- The Nurse-Family Partnership provides home visiting by registered nurses to at-risk parents of young children. Studies have shown that the program leads to a 79 percent reduction in child maltreatment and saves \$4 for every \$1 invested, by reducing future costs of substance abuse, crime, and welfare.
- Healthy Families America provides home visiting by trained paraprofessionals for families of children from birth to five. In five studies in different states, Healthy Families participants' rate of child maltreatment was less than half the statewide rate.

Building economic self-sufficiency

MAN aims to help families attain "success on all levels—academic, health, jobs, etc.," says Executive Director Richard Dana. So its home visiting program includes helping families "move forward financially" as well as the Birth and Beyond program.

Employment specialists "go into a home and do an assessment of the mom, to see whether she needs to get a GED, training, or go right into the workplace," says Brown. They can also connect parents to MAN's employment program, with certificate programs in medical work, data entry, and billing. "We're not only finding people jobs, but finding people careers," Brown adds. "By integrating family support programs with employment...we help family members prepare to get a job and keep it."

Promising results

The difference Birth and Beyond makes is "enormous," says Dickinson. He cites a 32 percent drop in substantiated reports of child maltreatment for families who have participated in Birth and Beyond.

Vigil agrees: "I've been able to grow as a person. I've become a better mother."

For more info:

- Birth and Beyond, 916-875-2020
- Mutual Assistance Network Family Resource Center, 916-927-7694

WHAT IS AN FRC?

The family resource center (FRC), part of an innovative strategy to promote healthy families and communities, is a warm and welcoming community hub that engages families in a variety of programs and activities that build on their strengths and meet basic needs. FRCs respond to what the community says it needs and often work in partnership with other community agencies.

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