



Media Release

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For Immediate Release

January 30, 2015

DCFS to kick off Nurturing Parenting Program in March

Training aimed at preventing abuse, reducing number of children coming into foster care

In an effort to prevent more children from coming into the state foster care system, the Arkansas Department of Human Services Division of Children and Family Services (DCFS) is launching a program in March that teaches the fundamentals of becoming a more nurturing parent. The program will be used to improve the parenting skills of those families who have already come into contact with child welfare system, but are not under court supervision.

“Child abuse is totally preventable. It’s man-made; it’s parent-made,” said Dr. Stephen J. Bavolek, who developed the Nurturing Parenting Program (NPP). “Nurturing is the remedy for preventing and treating child abuse and neglect.”

Nurturing Parenting is a training program for parents and their school age children. It has been used successfully in more than a dozen states, by the U.S. military and in other countries for more than 30 years.

Bavolek, who runs Family Development Resources, Inc., in Asheville, North Carolina, is an expert in creating nurturing families. He and Sharon Long, prevention team leader with MidSouth, the community service unit of the University of Arkansas School of Social Work, presented an overview of the program at a recent three and a half day training session in Little Rock. About 80 DCFS staff who work with families in Arkansas attended. More employees will be trained at future sessions so that they will be familiar with the terms and training as they interact with the families going through it.

Christin Harper, DCFS policy and professional development administrator, said caseworkers often encounter families who have problems that are not serious enough to take children into foster care.

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“It’s clear from our interactions with these families that with some training and guidance, they can be healthy, stable families,” Harper said. “So these are the families that the Nurturing Parenting training will help.”

Trainers from MidSOUTH will guide families through 16 weekly modules designed specifically to address parenting issues in Arkansas. The training, which can be conducted in a group setting or with individual families, is presented in 2 ½ hour weekly sessions that include both parents and children. Some of the topics covered in the extensive training include: developing family morals and values, building self-worth, understanding and expressing anger, and healthy ways to discipline.

In State Fiscal Year (SFY) 2014, DCFS served more than 24,000 children statewide through protective services cases. A protective services case is opened when there is a substantiated finding of child maltreatment, but the assessment finds there is a low level of risk to the child. As such, Division staff work with the family in the home to address the maltreatment issues rather than taking the child into foster care. By comparison, the Division served more than 7,000 children statewide in foster care cases during SFY 2014.

DCFS officials are hopeful that families will recognize the Nurturing Parenting Program’s value and appreciate the opportunity to improve their families without involvement of the court system. DCFS officials also hope that by implementing NPP and other prevention strategies, the Division will take a more proactive, rather than reactive, approach with families needing assistance. The Division anticipates that these prevention strategies may not only safely reduce the number of children entering the foster care system, but also lessen families’ reliance on and need for state assistance.

Long, from MidSOUTH, shared her own personal experience when as a young, new mother with a colicky baby boy, an experienced nurse told her, “From this moment, his picture of the world is you.

“I never forgot those words,” she said, adding that nurturing parents raise emotionally healthy children.

One key to understanding the idea of nurturing parenting is for adults to put themselves in their child’s place and in their partner’s place, Bavolek said.

“Be the parent you’d like raising you; and likewise, be the partner you’d like your partner to be to you.”