

Helping new parents do their best:

Just-in-time, instructional newsletters for new parents from University of Wisconsin-Extension.

What are age-paced newsletters?

We capitalize on the “teachable moment” of new parenthood with monthly, *just in time*, concise newsletters keyed to the age of each parent’s child. For example, parents of a 5-month-old baby receive the newsletter about 5-month-olds. Newsletter samples are available at <http://parenting.uwex.edu>. The newsletters are very simply written (5th grade reading level), but the content is not diluted. Tambien tenemos en Espanol, claro que si. Parents love them!

Why newsletters?

We know quite a bit about the kinds of parenting that are better or worse for children’s development. But how can we get that information into the hands of parents? Extension’s age-paced newsletters are delivered electronically by email, by hand as an adjunct to existing programs or may be mailed, and are especially useful for the high risk parents who avoid face-to-face programs. In Wisconsin, approximately half of all parents giving birth have received our monthly *Parenting the First Year* newsletter series since 1992. The newsletters are a remarkably inexpensive intervention.

Evaluations of the newsletters show they really work:

- * Parents rate the newsletters highly useful for childrearing advice more often than any other source of information, including physicians, nurses, relatives, and other printed materials. (1)
- * The newsletters are shared and discussed within the parents’ social networks, averaging two readers per newsletter. Over two-thirds of fathers read them. (2)
- * In studies in California, Delaware, and Wisconsin, those who reported changes in their behaviors and attitudes most, as a result of reading the newsletters, were the youngest, poorest and least educated. (1)
- * The above findings on usefulness, sharing of the newsletter, and self-reported behavior change have been replicated in an interview study with Spanish-speaking mothers in Oregon, whose educational levels averaged 8th grade. (3)
- * Parents receiving the newsletters for a year, compared to comparison group parents who did not, had beliefs about children significantly less like those of child abusing parents. They also reported spanking or slapping their babies significantly fewer times in the previous week. (4)
- * Parents receiving the newsletters for a year, compared to control group parents who did not, provided a significantly more intellectually stimulating home environment for their infants and toddlers. (4)

- * The newsletter has been successfully adapted for parents in England. Parents reported changing their behaviors in positive ways, especially with regard to providing more stimulating experiences for their baby. (5) Mothers in England who received the newsletters for one year, as compared to those who did not, significantly reduced both the frequency and intensity of reported “daily hassles,” and had more appropriate expectations of their infant’s behavior. (6)

Can other organizations use this resource?

Yes. University of Wisconsin-Extension is a public agency, and would like to help other family-serving organizations utilize this proven resource. The core newsletters can even be modified to include the name, logo, referral numbers, etc. of sponsoring organizations, so they appear to be their own publication. Information on licensing or purchase can be seen at our web site: <http://fyi.uwex.edu/using-parenting-newsletters/>

How can I learn more?

In Wisconsin, contact the Family Living Educator in your county Extension Office. From outside of Wisconsin, contact Dr. Dave Riley at dariley@wisc.edu.

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