

Strengthening Families and Bringing Hope to Children in Need

Who We Are

Shepherding the Next Generation is a nationwide, non-profit organization of evangelical Christian leaders committed to the development of strong and healthy families, with the focus on families in need.

Our commitment to shepherding the next generation arises out of the clear teaching of Scripture. Both the Old and New Testaments speak to the importance of family as the place where values and skills for life are taught and nurtured (e.g., Dt. 6:4-9; Ps. 78:5-8; Eph 6:4; 2 Tim. 1:5). However, some parents have a more difficult experience in child rearing than others, often lacking the knowledge, resources, or support of a spouse to raise their children towards lives of health, opportunity and values. It is our responsibility as followers of Christ to help all parents with support that will allow them to build strong families and communities.

We call on our local, state, and federal policymakers to embrace the following four-part research-based plan to strengthen American families. We need increased support to help ensure that the next generation develops the values and skills they will need to become responsible adults and good neighbors.



“Then little children were brought to Jesus for him to place his hands on them and pray for them. But the disciples rebuked those who brought them. Jesus said, “Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of heaven belongs to such as these.”

Matthew 19:13-14 (NIV)

Across all ages, there are effective interventions for kids and their parents. Some start before birth, others are proven to work with

older kids, even serious juvenile offenders. While no plan can prevent every problem within families and communities, this common-sense approach is based on the latest research about what really works:

- **Voluntary parent coaching for teen mothers;**
- **Early education and care for at-risk children;**
- **Guidance for families with troubled children; and,**
- **Programs helping young men to become responsible fathers and productive employees.**

Parenting Support for At-Risk Mothers

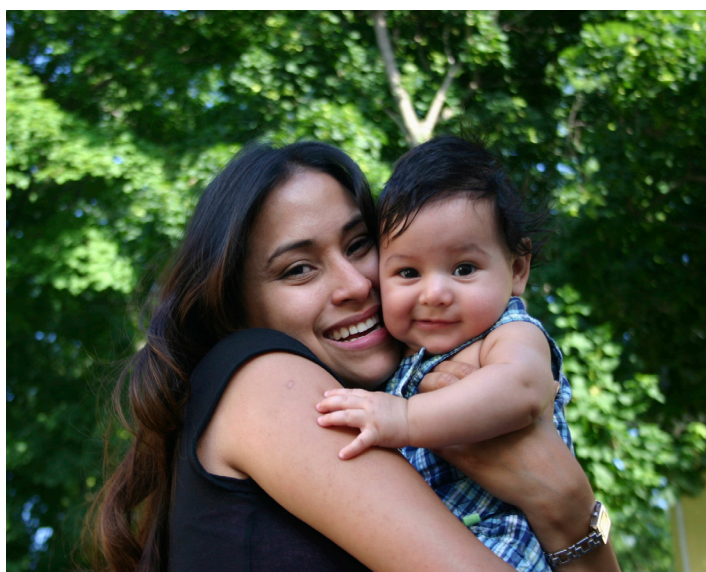
“Train a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not turn from it.”

Proverbs 22:6 (NIV)

We want all parents to be equipped with the skills and knowledge necessary to raise a healthy, vibrant child – this is especially important for young teen mothers. When an at-risk teenager is

pregnant, she is facing a teachable moment. Offering the mother-to-be voluntary parent coaching before her child is born and continuing for up to two years after the birth of her first child is proven not only to help the mother get her life in order, but also to help her become a competent and caring mother to her child. One program, the Nurse-Family Partnership, found that:

- Abuse and neglect was cut nearly in half;
- The children's involvement in later crime was cut by more than half;
- The fathers were more involved in their families; and
- The mothers were up to a third less likely to be dependent on welfare.¹



In addition, when mothers-to-be abuse drugs, the long-term impacts on their children can be irreversible or even deadly. A program that provided substance-abuse coaching and treatment to pregnant women in Baltimore cut the number of births of very low birth-weight babies and their time in the newborn intensive care units so dramatically that the treatment paid for itself even before the babies were taken home from the hospital.²

Another effort for younger children called Triple-P, the Positive Parenting Program, offers parents a range of voluntary options for picking up valuable parenting skills. These specific skills help parents teach their children how to behave responsibly.

The Triple-P system was tested in counties throughout South Carolina. Compared to the counties that did not receive the program, Triple-P counties averaged 25 percent fewer cases of abuse and neglect, 33 percent lower foster care placements, and 35 percent fewer emergency room visits or hospitalizations for abuse.³

Early Educational Opportunities

“Whoever welcomes one of these little children in my name welcomes me; and whoever welcomes me does not welcome me but the one who sent me.”

Mark 9:37 (NIV)

For young children, early education can help lay the foundation for future academic and social success. Yet too many families are unable to afford quality early educational programs, and for financial reasons, they are also unable to stay at home. As a result, too many disadvantaged children start school already behind their classmates in early math and reading skills. They often lack the social skills needed to follow teachers' directions and get along with their peers. These problems can create a pattern of failure that lasts a lifetime. High-quality early childhood education can give at-risk children the strong start they will need in school and in life.

For example, a rigorous study found that among the children who participated in the high-quality Perry Preschool program:

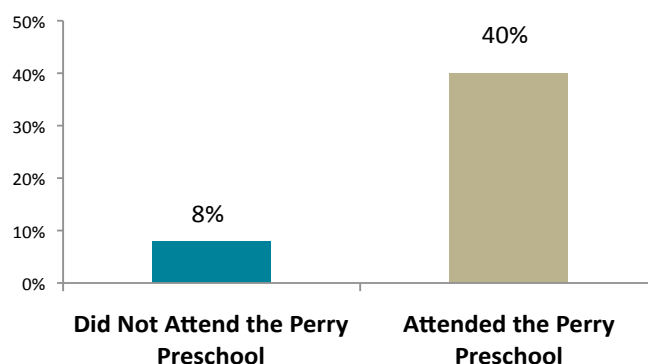
- High school graduation rates were 44 percent higher by age 27;
- Incomes were 36 percent higher by age 40; and
- The girls who had been in the program were five times more likely to be married and living with their husbands by age 27.

For those *not* in the program:

- The men were 63 percent more likely to have had children they did not raise; and

Girls attending the Perry Preschool program were five times more likely by age 27 to be married and living with their husband.

Women married and living with their husband



Schweinhart, 1993

- Youth were five times more likely to become chronic offenders (more than four arrests) by age 27.⁴

Another rigorously studied early education program, Child-Parent Centers (CPC), has served over 100,000 children in Chicago. The children who participated in that program were almost a third more likely to graduate from high school, whereas similar children left out were 87 percent more likely to be in foster care due to abuse or neglect, and 24 percent more likely to be incarcerated by age 20 than the children participating in the program.⁵

Guidance for Troubled Young People and Their Families

“The King will reply, ‘I tell you the truth, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did for me.’”
Matthew 25:40 (NIV)

Over 2 million juveniles are arrested every year in America.⁶ If their crimes are serious or frequent enough, they will face placement in a group home or other juvenile facility. For many, this is only another step along the path to further involvement in juvenile and then adult crimes, destroying families and communities, as well as their own futures.

As Christians, we seek to reach out to offenders and help them get back on the right track. According to rigorous research, three well-established family coaching programs provide valuable parenting guidance and help parents better direct their children’s behaviors away from lives of delinquency. New arrests of youths in these family-coaching programs were cut by as much as half compared to similar troubled youths in families not receiving this help.⁷

Fathers Engaged in Parenting

“Fathers, do not exasperate your children; instead, bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord.”
Ephesians 6:4 (NIV)

Sadly, too many young fathers are missing from their children’s lives. An approach, offering voluntary alternative high schools called Career Academies, was not specifically designed to be a fatherhood program. However, it delivers solid fatherhood results. Career Academies provide small learning communities combining academic and technical curricula with a career theme, such as the culinary arts or the construction trades. The academies emphasize hands-on training with internships and partnerships with local employers. Eight years after high school, the academies had increased the average incomes of the at-risk young men who attended by \$4,332

per year, increased the number of men who were married and living with their wives by 33 percent, and increased the number of men who were living with their children by 45 percent. Apparently, helping young men become employable also helps them become better husbands and fathers.⁸

And, as already noted above, the girls who had been in the Perry Preschool program were five times more likely to be married and living with their husbands by age 27.



Saving Money

Each of these four areas strengthen families, help kids, and also produce substantial savings by cutting welfare, incarceration and other costs. For example:

- The Nurse-Family Partnership home visiting program produced net savings, on average, of \$18,000 per family and saved \$3 for every \$1 invested.⁹
- The Child-Parent Centers in Chicago saved, on average, \$31,000 per family and almost \$5 for every \$1 invested.¹⁰
- Helping troubled teens with family coaching cuts crime costs alone so effectively it saves, on average, \$18,000 to \$89,000 per child.¹¹

Our Call

Pastors, chaplains, and Christian leaders from a variety of churches and ministries are already on the front lines working to strengthen families and help children in need. Therefore, they are in an appropriate position to educate our nation’s policymakers about this four-pronged, research-based plan that will serve our nation’s most vulnerable citizens early in life. Increased investments are necessary to help them live with dignity, safety, and health; make positive contributions to society; and someday, raise strong, healthy families themselves.

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