

Wholehearted Family Policies: More Choice for Parents, Cost Savings for Government

A poster presentation by

Catherine H. Myers and Heidi L. Brennan, representing Family and Home Network
at the

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Leading the way to Quality Early Child Care and Education

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Administration for Children and Families
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Principles of Wholehearted Family Policy*

- Meeting children's needs for consistent nurturing care and generous amounts of time with their parents must be the basis of all family support policies.
- Flexible policies must encourage and support parents' initiative and ingenuity in caring for their children.
- Public policies (including tax laws, child care subsidies and information services) must support all quality care for children, which includes at-home parenting, tag-team parenting, kinship care and parent babysitting co-ops.

* Introduced in
November 2003 by:

Family and 
*Home Network*TM
Publisher of Welcome Home[®]

A national grassroots nonprofit organization offering:

- Information about: the true needs of children, opportunities for personal growth for at-home parents, affordability, housing options, and more.
- Support to parents: monthly award-winning journal *Welcome Home*; interactive website; discussion guides for parents, links to parent support groups nationwide.
- Advocacy for children and parents: speaking up to the media, testifying in Congress; advising think tanks and government agencies.

www.FamilyAndHome.org

Children Need:

Consistent Nurturing Care as the Foundation for Learning

Dr. T. Berry Brazelton and Dr. Stanley I. Greenspan

Nationally renowned for their clinical practices, their teaching, writing and researching, pediatrician T. Berry Brazelton and child psychiatrist Stanley I. Greenspan joined forces to write *The Irreducible Needs of Children: What Every Child Must Have to Grow, Learn and Flourish* (Perseus Books, October 2000).

This book brings the doctors' decades of experience and sterling reputations to bear in answering the question asked a few years ago at a White House Conference on Infant and Child Development: What types of early experiences are vital for intellectual and emotional growth—and how much of each is necessary?

The doctors say:

“In the first three years, every child needs one or two primary caregivers who remain in a steady, intimate relationship with that child.”

“We can't experience the consistency and intimacy of ongoing love unless we've had that experience with someone in our lives. [...] This basic feature of caring relationships between a baby and a caregiver who really knows her over the long haul is responsible for a surprisingly large number of vital mental capacities.

“...we believe that in the first two years of life full-time daycare is a difficult context in which to provide the ongoing, nurturing care by one or a few caregivers that the child requires.”



ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Hardwired to Connect

A distinctive and creative new report, “Hardwired To Connect: The New Scientific Case for Authoritative Communities,” combines data from unique and diverse sources to come to a deeper understanding of children’s needs and ways to meet them. Released September 2003, it was sponsored by the YMCA of the USA, Dartmouth Medical School and the Institute for American Values. The report was prepared by the Commission on Children at Risk: 33 prominent and innovative neuroscientists, children’s doctors, and social scientists who study civil society, as well as youth service professionals. In addition to acknowledging the litany of negative symptoms seen in children, the report places greater emphasis on *how* we as a society are thinking about these problems. It claims that we are putting most of our problem-solving emphasis on medications, psychotherapies, and special programs for “at risk” children, while ignoring a much larger problem: broad *environmental* conditions that are significant contributors to children’s suffering today. The report claims, “In large measure, what’s causing this crisis of American childhood is a lack of *connectedness*. We mean two kinds of connectedness – close connections to other people, and deep connections to moral and spiritual meaning.”

* The Institute for American Values website is: www.americanvalues.org. Phone: (212)246-3942. Single copies of the report are available for \$7. See website or call for multiple copy discounts.

Canadian Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children

Given the evidence that permanent emotional damage -- deficient capacities for trust, empathy and affection -- can be inflicted relatively easily during the very early years of life, CSPCC’s concern is with ignorance of, or indifference to, the emotional needs of very young children. CSPCC believes that most parents are willing and able to provide their infants and toddlers with the care they have been biologically programmed to need -- when they receive the necessary support. CSPCC is working toward higher status for parenting, greater support for parents with young children, increased emphasis on trust, empathy and affection in the adult world, and vastly improved preparation for parenthood. www.empathicparenting.org

Parents Want: Children Cared for by People Who Love Them

Public Agenda, a nonpartisan, nonprofit opinion research and education organization founded in 1975, examined the views of three groups—parents, employers and children’s advocates—for their study on child care issues, *Necessary Compromises* (2000). The “parents” part of the study involved 815 parents who had children age 5 or under.

Among the findings:

“For the vast majority of parents, having a parent at home full-time is by far the best way to provide care for children 5 years or under, and nearly half say they have made arrangements to do this. By overwhelming margins, parents say the love and sustained attention a parent offers simply cannot be replicated by other forms of care. Parents also believe that children raised by a stay-at-home parent are more likely to learn strong values and considerate behavior than children in child care. When a parent cannot be home, parents say, child care by a close relative is best. Despite their strong belief in and preference for one-on-one parental care, parents do say that other arrangements can be of high quality and of benefit to kids.”

Asked to say which is the “best child care arrangement during a child’s earliest years,” **70% said “to have one parent stay at home,”** 14% said “to have both parents work different shifts so one is almost always at home,” 6% said “to have a close relative look after the child,” 6% said “to place the child in a quality day care center,” 2% said “to bring the child to a mom in the neighborhood who cares for children in her home,” and 2% said “to have a nanny or babysitter at home.”



Government information and services must acknowledge these facts:

- 1) children have an irreducible need for consistent, nurturing care;**
- 2) in most cases, parents are best suited to meet their children’s needs;**
- 3) the majority of parents provide care for their own children in lieu of purchased child care.**

Those who work in governmental positions providing support to families must understand the misconceptions about families that have driven policy-making for decades. These misunderstandings did not come about by accident. Child care advocates, many of them understandably focused on improving the quality of care for children, marginalized those parents (mostly mothers) who chose to care for their own children. References to at-home mothers emphasized that their societal contributions were minimal, their total numbers small, and their choice to remain at home either foolishly risky or economically privileged. Yet, despite enormous cultural pressure and growing economic burdens, many parents continued to decide that parental care was best for their children, and many left the workforce or reduced work hours to care for their children.

MYTHS UPON WHICH CURRENT POLICY IS BASED

Myth: The majority of mothers are employed and thus their children need child care.

Statistics on “working mothers” do not accurately reflect how parents care for their children and should not be used in policy debates, media reports or public discussions about the care of children.

The U.S. Department of Labor statistic on “mothers in the workforce” simply divides mothers into two categories: employed and not employed. The DOL definition of “employed person” includes anyone who during the survey week: worked part-time as little as one hour per week or as little as one week out of the year; worked in her own business or profession or on her own farm; worked 15 hours or more as an unpaid worker in a family-operated enterprise; provided alternate child care for money; or was temporarily absent from her job for a reason such as maternity leave (whether or not she returned to her job), illness, vacation, bad weather or a labor-management dispute.

Mothers simply cannot be defined by their work/home choices, and their employment status does not indicate their need for child care for their children. Millions of children whose mothers are employed full-time are cared for by their fathers while their mothers work – either because their fathers are the stay-at-home parent in their family, or because their parents are working different shifts.

In researching the issue of child care (Necessary Compromises, 2000), Public Agenda found that **nearly half of parents with children age 5 or under said that in their family, they’ve arranged to have a parent home full-time.**

Myth: Only families who are wealthy can afford to have a parent at home

Many people incorrectly assume that the only families who can afford to have an at-home parent are wealthy. A look at Census Bureau data helps to dispel this misconception. A comparison of the 1997 median earnings of a father with a non-employed wife (\$37,116) to the median earnings of a father with an employed wife (\$35,713) shows that the fathers in both types of families have nearly identical earnings -- a difference of just \$1,403 per year.

Myth: At-home mothers are wasting their education, throwbacks to the 1950’s, and/or abandoning feminism. At-home fathers are dropping out of the “real world” and must be less masculine than other men.

At-home parents and those who cut back to part-time employment to care for their children are tired of the stereotypes. They should be accorded the same respect as a colleague who moves to a new employer. Many will re-enter the paid workforce (as employees or as entrepreneurs) in the future, bringing with them personal growth and skills learned at home. Contributing volunteer time in their communities, they will help to build the “village” that benefits all children. Women who make this choice are not “giving up” on the women’s movement. And they most assuredly resent being referred to in comparison with 1950’s sitcoms such as *Ozzie and Harriet* or *Leave It To Beaver* (June Cleaver). Men who take on the role of primary caregiver do not want to be stereotyped as a clownish “Mr. Mom.” At-home fathers are doing real work.

Myth: At-home parents are in unequal marriages and are risking their future security.

As in a business partnership in which individuals specialize, marriages in which one parent stays at home to care for the children can be equal and respectful relationships. On the other hand, an equal division of income earning and caregiving work does not guarantee mutual respect between spouses. In some cases, a spouse refuses to consider both his/her partner’s desire to forgo or cut back on paid employment to care for their child(ren) and the benefits to their child(ren), choosing to value only income-earning work. Just as a person’s desire to pursue a career demands respect, her/his desire to nurture children deserves no smaller measure of respect.

Regarding divorce, most parents don’t want to base caregiving decisions on “worst case” scenarios. Divorce laws should be changed, so when a couple has a history of dividing the caregiving/income-earning work in whatever way they see fit, the work of both spouses is valued equally. In the case of divorce, all material assets, including retirement assets, should be equally shared. Children’s needs for consistent nurturing care should be the primary factor in determining custody and visitation. For guidelines, see *The Irreducible Needs of Children* by T. Berry Brazelton, M.D. and Stanley I. Greenspan, M.D..

POLICIES AND PRACTICES THAT DISCRIMINATE

Dependent Care Tax Credit

The Dependent Care Tax Credit is discriminatory. Most states use a model of the federal tax code for their own dependent care tax credit if they offer one. Families who provide many kinds of quality care for their children are not eligible for this credit. It is available to families who pay for child care and document their expenses – and there is no income limit. Families not eligible include those who utilize: an at-home parent, “tag-team” parenting (parents work different shifts), kinship care, work-at-home (either full or part-time), babysitting co-ops, and a number of other creative, nurturing ways parents care for their children.

These families cross all lines regarding income, race, and family compositions. Here are a few examples:

- Family with a new baby. Mom arranges to work at home one day a week. Dad cuts back to part-time work, staying home with baby two days a week. Grandma takes care of baby the other two days.
- Divorced mom, with under \$200 per month of child support from her child’s father. Sold her home and lived on the proceeds for two years. She is a nurse, works two night shifts per week, hiring a college student to stay with her daughter. Buys all clothing, toys and her car used. Has time to volunteer in her child’s school and with the Red Cross.
- Married couple, father is a truck driver. Mother does bookkeeping at home for her church (part-time). Their child is not in out-of-home care.
- Single mom with teens. Moving off welfare, she was trained for a full-time job as a police officer. Then she found a second job to make ends meet. Her teens’ behavior, emotional well-being and her own health were factors in her decision to quit the second job. She realized how little time she had left for her teens, who still needed her attention.

Government services and information

Billions of dollars of federal and state funds are spent each year in efforts to improve the quality of child care, to subsidize the cost for lower-income families and to provide information to parents. Next to nothing is spent in support of parents who choose to care for their own children – the majority of parents with children age five and under. Providing information and support to all families regarding the care of their children should be the goal of government divisions with names such as “Office for Children.” But the current reality is that parents who care for their own children (and parents who *want* to make this choice) are almost always ignored by government at all levels and offered no services or information that might help.

ADDRESSING THE INEQUITY

- Acknowledge that parents deserve information about a full range of choices regarding the care of children.
- Adopt a set of principles against which to measure proposed policies as well as information services.
- Respect the knowledge of parent-led local and national grassroots organizations, consulting them when researching and designing resource and referral material.

Cost-Effective Ways to Help More Families

Publicize innovative grassroots solutions

HOUSING

Co-Abode – a match-making service for single mothers seeking to share housing. www.co-abode.com

Neighborhood Assistance Corporation of America – helping low- and moderate-income people obtain low-cost mortgages with no down payment. www.naca.com

AFFORDABILITY:

FAHN's Affordability Survey and regular articles in *Welcome Home*. www.familyandhome.org

Financial calculator/worksheet for those considering cutting back on family income (Kiplinger's has one, see link on FAHN's website).

... and more resources about cost-cutting, home-based businesses and values-based limits on consumption.

HEALTH INSURANCE

Information about Archer Medical Savings accounts (an option for those who are self-employed or employees of small businesses) – see IRS publication 969.

SUPPORT and COMMUNITY:

Family and Home Network – publisher of the award-winning monthly journal *Welcome Home*, and many other resources, including a discussion guide for small groups of parents, *Transitioning Home: changing your focus from career to home*.

Parent organizations offering local chapter meetings throughout the U.S. – including Mocha Moms, National Association of Mothers' Centers, La Leche League, Attachment Parenting International, At-Home Dad Network, and many more. (see "Resources and Links" on www.familyandhome.org)

Family Support America – promoting family support centers nationwide. www.familysupportamerica.org



Enhance and enrich the relationship between early childhood professionals and parents

Respect ALL the quality care parents provide for their children.

Help parents find resources on a range of options regarding the care of their children, and acknowledge that they may change their minds and change care arrangements as their family changes.

Avoid stereotypes about at-home parents.

Affirm parents' efforts to spend generous amounts of time with their children.

Seek ways to provide flexible, part-time quality child care.

Share child development information with parents and convey to them your confidence in their ability to learn to provide enrichment and early education for their child.

Invite parent involvement in planning and design regarding resource and referral materials for your community, and acknowledge their work.

Model family-friendly employment policies: provide meaningful part-time (under 10 hours/week) positions, flexible workplace, flexible schedules.

An innovative program: At-Home Infant Care (AHIC)

AHIC enables lower-income parents to care for their children in their own homes.

Attributes of AHIC

- Helps to address the critical shortage of infant care
- Values parenting as work
- 71% in Montana's pilot AHIC program were single parent families
- Helps hard-to-serve rural families
- Supports the importance of a child's early development
- Results in cost savings to government - as measured by the number of families who would otherwise have used the cc subsidy program and by the number of those who would have had more than one child in care.

Eligibility requirements vary from state to state with regard to family income and prior employment or educational pursuit. Payments to parents are usually based on the average cost for subsidized child care in the area.

AHIC Nationwide

- **Minnesota:** AHIC originally created in 1997; repealed in 2003; new law was signed June 2004. Funding: state child care funds.
- **Montana:** AHIC piloted 12/01-01/03, law passed in 2003; it is not funded at this time.
- **Missouri:** 1998 law created the "Stay-at-Home Parent Program." Funded by the state with portion of the entrance fees to riverboat casinos.
- Several other states are working to establish programs.
- **At the Federal level:** In 2002, both the proposed child care and welfare bills included AHIC provisions. In 2003 all AHIC provisions were dropped. As of July 2004, an amendment to the Pride Act (the current welfare bill) has been filed, to provide \$30 million a year (for five years) for pilot AHIC programs in ten states.

For More Information:

Family and Home Network -- Cathy Myers: 703-352-1072; www.FamilyAndHome.org

National Partnership for Women and Families -- Lissa Bell: 202-986-2600; www.NationalPartnership.org

National Child Care Information Center -- <http://www.nccic.org/poptopics/stateathome.html>

Minnesota -- Dawn VanRyn, Department of Human Services: 651-284-1111

Missouri -- Cindy Reese, Department of Social Services: 573-522-8150

Montana -- Linda Fillinger, Child Care Administrator: 866-239-0548

WEEL (Working for Equality and Economic Liberation), in Montana -- Mary Caferro: 1-888-543-2530; www.weelepowers.org

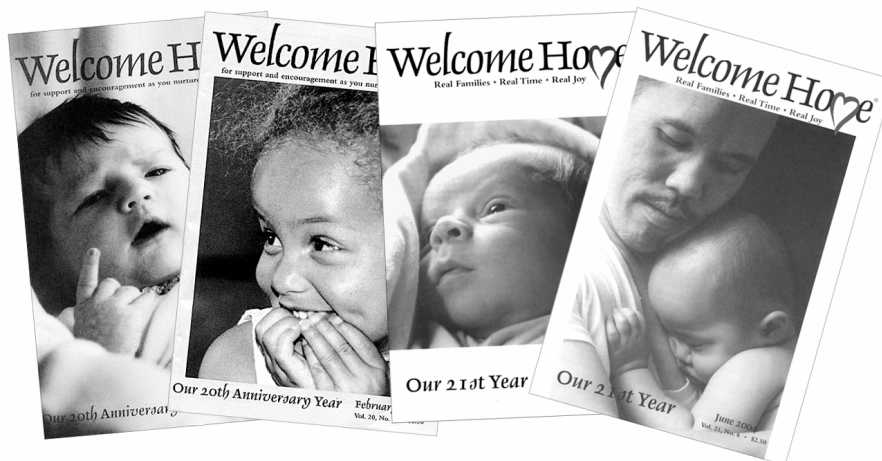
Family and Home Network

CELEBRATING
20 YEARS

Publisher of *Welcome Home*®

Family and Home Network, a national nonprofit organization founded in 1984, advocates for parents and children of all ages concerning their need to spend generous amounts of time together. FAHN publishes a monthly journal, *Welcome Home* (recipient of many awards, including several Parents' Choice awards). Membership in the organization may be obtained with or without a subscription to *Welcome Home*, and members contribute to a fund which subsidizes subscriptions for those who cannot afford them. Information and support is also offered to parents through FAHN's books and educational materials, the newest of which is a discussion guide for small groups of parents who are changing their focus from career to home – *Transitioning Home*.

FAHN's work includes advocating for public policies that recognize the critical importance of nurturing and increase the opportunities for parents to spend time with their children. The Family and Home Network website offers extensive information for parents and policy makers.



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