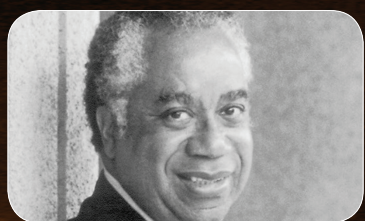


Urban Trends

COLLECTION



THE PARENTING ISSUE



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FromThePresident

We all want the best for our children. But what do they need most from us, beyond the basics of food, clothing and shelter, to grow up to be competent, mentally and emotionally healthy and confident?

MEE knows the tough issues that today's children and youth face every day—poverty, street violence, peer pressure, feeling disconnected from school, the lure of early sex and drug abuse (as a way to cope with urban stress and trauma), parent absence and social isolation (which can lead to self-destructive behaviors like eating disorders, cutting and even suicide). We have seen the negative consequences in our community when youth have a vacuum in the space where loving and wise guidance from a caring adult could make a difference.

This *UrbanTrends* deals with several topics related to the daunting tasks parents face. We explore the “ages and stages” of child development; review strategies to engage and involve parents, including dads; share insights from one of the top minds in Black psychology; a unique intervention to reduce stress for young mother's; offer tips on how parents can actively support academic success for their children; and tell you about several MEE resources aimed at providing a culturally-relevant perspective on effective parenting.

We are focusing on the challenges when children evolve from cute little ones into adolescents. Just at the time that our teens want to be more independent and make their own choices, what they really need is for us to be involved even more. That's why MEE is working on several projects that provide parents with the knowledge, training and support they need to improve their communication skills. Informed parents can instill our youth with opportunity-finding and other skills that will help them thrive.

Ivan Juzang, President
MEEPROD@aol.com

Kids Don't Come with Instructions: Parenting Challenges in Today's Environment

Just about everyone has an opinion on what is—and what is not—good parenting. Successful parenting calls for time, money, energy and love. Keeping those elements—and others—in balance, makes effective parenting hard work, stressful and often challenging, particularly when parents lack the support systems that can step in and help them out from time to time.

Over the past decade, MEE has had several opportunities to learn more about what it takes to be a “good” parent in an urban environment that brings a unique set of realities. We have concentrated on sharing strategies to help even the most stressed-out parents cope with obstacles to positive parenting and raising healthy, happy children.

ment of a culturally-relevant parenting toolkit, MEE conducted focus groups with low-income parents raising inner-city children under six years old in Atlanta, Los Angeles and Philadelphia. We asked them to help us create messages that caregivers like them would need to help them raise their children more successfully. These parents ranged in age from 22 to 31, and had children as young as one month old. We uncovered several consistencies that can be useful in understanding and supporting parents who are busy juggling many roles, and have few resources but plenty of stress.

Almost all of the parents cited too little money and too little time as their major concerns. Faced with challenges in meeting their family's

For a project that led to the develop-

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Parenting in the Real World Kids Don't Come with Instructions



Few parenting education products focus on the needs—and realities—of low-income parents of color. However, MEE worked with the Center for Child Well-being to create a toolkit called *Parenting in the Real World: Kids Don't Come with Instructions (PRW)*. It is being used as part of a multi-session, interactive program designed to help parents of children under age three. In an evaluation study, parents who went through the program overwhelmingly reported learning new skills that helped to reduce their stress and make them feel more confident as parents. They all said that they would recommend the program to a friend.

The 90-minute PRW sessions deal with discipline strategies; the struggles to balance work, school and family; how parents can take time for themselves; and creating a strong support system. The accompanying toolkit contains a MEE-produced video that captures real-life moments in the lives of everyday single parents and families in Philadelphia, Atlanta and Los Angeles. They frankly discuss their difficulties with discipline, finding quality childcare and more. For more information or to order the Toolkit, go to www.meeproductions.com/MEETV or call MEE toll-free 1-877-MEE-PROD (633-7763).

Getting Dads More Involved

Single-parent families are no longer an anomaly in our society. The terms “baby mama” and “baby daddy” are firmly embedded in our popular culture. **As marriage rates continue to decline in the U.S., the absence of full-time fathers must be reckoned with.** To better understand the day-to-day realities of growing numbers of single parents in urban communities, MEE conducted focus groups in 2004 and 2010 with low-income parents, as well as with soon-to-be teen mothers and with service providers who work in underserved communities.

A particular focus of this research was to uncover how we could get fathers more fully engaged in childrearing. Women in these and other focus groups have often accused Black fathers of being low participators in the lives of their children; we endeavored to find out why. In response to being criticized as being uninvolved, both **African American and Latino males complained that all the mothers want is money, not their involvement in raising the child.** Many of these fathers also felt that the justice and human services systems have an unfair bias in favor of women.

Both men and women said they believe that the primary role of males is to be **a father who “provides.” That pressure, men said, causes some fathers to disappear from their child’s life** because they can’t support their family. Others speculated that many males aren’t actively parenting their children because they didn’t have fathers and don’t know how to really be an involved father. “It’s like nature. If an animal doesn’t have a parent there to teach him how to hunt, he’s not going to learn anything. So if you grow up without a father, it’s gonna happen again [when you have a child].”



Issues with the mother of the child often keep fathers missing, too. One African American male explained, “They [men] may like the girl and love the baby, but they’re like ‘I’m not feelin’ this [being in a live-in or married relationship].”

Despite a lack of significant child-rearing participation on the part of some young fathers, the young men in the groups did not appear to be anti-fatherhood. In fact, many of them felt that having children has made them more responsible. One African-American father said, “Having my daughter has humbled me tremendously. Just having her makes me want to get up and go to work in the morning and keeps me focused.” Similarly, a Latino father said that the best part about being a dad is “that I have matured, learned to be patient and to listen.”

Men seemed less interested in formally learning parenting skills—though few classes are targeted specifically to them anyway—than in programs that could help them get or keep a job. **They believed that men with jobs would be better fathers, in both the quality and quantity of participation in their children’s lives.** Feeling unstable about the future, many unem-

ployed males admitted to hustling, selling drugs, being arrested or getting “caught up in the streets.” They also said, however, that being a father is an incentive to do better, because they want to be good influences on their children.

Low-income fathers of color need much better support systems. This includes programs that acknowledge and deal with the particular challenges they face as men who have been raised in an often-hostile society. Esteemed Black psychologist Dr. Joe White says that there are many complex issues impacting the social and emotional development of today’s Black man, but says that embracing core African-American psychological strengths can help him fulfill his life dreams—and become a better parent. **Men need to know that they matter in the lives of their children just as much as mothers do—and not just as a monetary resource.** Fathers need job support that is easily accessible and deals with their realities. For families to become effective units, service providers need to offer help that brings mothers and fathers together and that equally addresses their needs—whether they are together as a couple or not. [UT](#)

A “Pampering” Intervention: Short-Term Stress Relief for Young Moms



Attention to the health and well-being of single-mothers is especially important, because these mothers frequently suffer from high levels of stress. MEE conducted a project with low-income single mothers in North Carolina to determine how to encourage these mothers to seek support to minimize the stress in their lives.

MEE offered nearly 100 mothers from a public housing community a day away from stress, at a pampering event just for them. More than just a day of beauty, the pampering events were designed to innovatively reach and teach young mothers about how to better deal with the stresses of being a single parent.

MEE focused on creating the right environment for promoting support. To effectively engage mothers who are struggling just to survive, such events should be held in a user-friendly environment that while conducive to learning, also gives mothers the opportunity to relieve stress, make connections with others dealing with similar issues, learn about local support services, and feel like they have what it takes to be a great parent.

We sought out a location that could be transformed into a “spa-like” atmosphere, with dimly-lit spaces for indulging in facials, manicures, pedicures, massages and aromatherapy sessions that provided absolute relaxation and stress release. The environment overflowed with calming ambience, in the form of subliminally relaxing music and sound effects, fresh fruit and other healthy appetizers and an assortment of herbal teas and infusions for the mothers' delight. Licensed practitioners

were identified and recruited from an array of local services.

During MEE's event, participants were encouraged to mingle and talk with other mothers. These interactions decreased the feeling of isolation that mothers of young children sometimes feel, and allowed them to see that “they are not alone.” A kind of informal “support group” was created through the interaction of these women with similar challenges and interests.

A key feature of pampering events should be a series of “information zones” where mothers can pick up information from community-based organizations about their services and talk to local “experts” about issues that are on their minds. Zones can also include short (10 to 20-minute) small-group learning sessions, on topics such as:

- Effective and age-appropriate discipline strategies for children;
- Information on “ages & stages” of early childhood development;
- How to create balance in one's life;
- Easy-to-implement stress relieving activities;
- Dealing with hyperactive children or those with developmental delays; and
- Job training and development (including GEDs, continuing education and community colleges).

Information zones can link mothers with local community resources that offer information and assistance in a variety of areas that can help make their jobs as parents easier.

These events/interventions are a great start toward encouraging healthy parent-child relationships. An initial evaluation of this project showed that young mothers overwhelmingly felt that the Day of Pampering provided good parenting and stress management information, increased their informal social support networks, and introduced them to resources available in their communities of which they had not been aware.

U



MEE's Parent Training DVD and Guides Supports Mental Wellness Dialogue

Storytelling, historically, has been the most common way of teaching others, particularly in oral tradition-based cultures (African Americans and Latinos). It still is a valuable learning and training tool. Many parents are natural storytellers and are interested in using their strong oral communications, persuasion and interpersonal skills for improving outcomes in their own homes and in their community as a whole. MEE's latest parent-focused DVD and guides will help them be prepared to hold effective dialogue with their peers (other parents/caregivers), focusing on six critical topic areas:

- Ages & Stages
- Effective Parent-Teen Communication
- Mental Wellness for Parents
- Building Resilience in Our Children
- Support and Strength in a Crisis
- Making the System Work for You

The guides that accompany the DVD contain a variety of training tools. Vignette scenarios, including multiple characters, summary dialogue (including take-away messages) and an authentic, credible theme to illustrate each key content area. These vignettes can be used as is, or tailored to reflect the themes pertinent to each parent's situation. The guides also include role-playing exercises that help parents develop effective counter-arguments that are critical to changing behavior and attitudes. Included with the DVD and guides are components from MEE's groundbreaking Community Wellness Toolkit.

www.mee productions.com/plan

A Parenting Conversation with Dr. Joseph White

We are pleased to share excerpts from an *Urban Trends* interview conducted with Dr. White. Read the entire interview at www.mee productions.com/plan

Ages & Stages

MEE: What do we need to do to get parents prepared to deal with “the psychological challenges” and the developmental realities that are going to be coming at young people?

Dr. White: Kids face two major challenges. The first is what we call in psychology, “identity.” The kids have to decide who they really are. That struggle lasts a few years ... before they land on their feet.

Then, as they move from 13 to 19, they have to make some major decisions about drugs, about sex, about peer affiliation and about the future direction of their lives, i.e., what is important to them? A child not only grows bigger, but their hormones start to flashing and then they have a different set of interests than they did when they were eight years old. And that triggers a whole bunch of stresses in parents. It's hard for the parent to talk to their children about sexuality if they're not comfortable with it themselves.

Effective Parent-Teen Communication

MEE: How do we help parents have a genuine dialogue with their kids?

Dr. White: We want parents to be able to give kids the information they need about sex, about school, about gangs. [You have] to give them the information and allow the child some time to work through and process that information, check it out, come back, argue, and so on. The children may say “no” before they say “yes.” What the children need to learn is that, when they do behave in ways that please the parents, the parents will cut them some slack.

Mental Wellness for Parents

MEE: How do we give parents that permission to take care of themselves, to “keep their cup full?”

Dr. White: We give them permission by starting with their stated goal...that they want to be effective [as a caregiver]. For

example, they say, “I want to work with my kids. I want to make sure my grandmother has health care. I want to see my son once a week who's in jail. I want to get some food for the lady next door.”

Now, we have to say, “You cannot be effective over time if you don't take care of yourself.” You say you want to do these things without getting drained. To accomplish your goal, you have to keep your cup full; otherwise, you're going to be filled with fatigue and resentment.”

Also the caregiver has to identify others who can help carry the burden, so one person doesn't have to do everything themselves. A caregiver should have a network of caregivers, so that they can shift the burden to other people who could help them out. [Sometimes] they can see you going down before you recognize that you've gone down.

Building Resilience in Our Children

MEE: What have you found in your research, in your practice, that enables folks to land on their feet? What enables some to thrive in the worst conditions? What does the community need to be aware of, so we can transmit thriving psychological strengths?

Dr. White: Number one is hope...if you have hope, you have a belief in the future. Keeping hope alive, that the darkness of the night will pass and there will be a brighter tomorrow. That was a theme all the way through Martin Luther King, Jr. Keep hope alive and that keeps you energized because, once you lose hope, then it shuts down.

The second thing is: you have to have some victories along the way. That reinforces self-confidence.

And, the third thing is: with the hope, with the self-confidence, then you begin to learn that you can be resourceful, you can be resilient, you can connect to people who will do you some good, and you will have that deep spiritual base.

Kids have to learn opportunity-seizing skills. I don't care how bleak the neighborhood is. Something is going on in the way of opportunity, but the child has to

find it. It won't come to them. You've got to reach out and get it and be prepared that somebody's going to say, “No” to you. That shouldn't discourage you forever. You just go knock on another door and keep knocking 'til something happens.

Parent First Aid—Support and Strength in a Crisis

MEE: What should parents know when their child has experienced trauma?

Dr. White: What that child or young adult needs is somebody to be there for them, even if they can't talk about the trauma. There is a vast potential for healing in all human beings, to become stronger in the broken places. They've been raped, Grandma died, there's no food in the house. The caregiver's got to get their feet on the ground and be able to be comfortable sitting with somebody who's experiencing powerful human trauma.

The second thing is what I mentioned earlier: we need to create more of these healing circles in the community where we can get together, where we can pray together, burn some incense, hold hands, sing, but be there for each other. The human contact is what people need, the love.

Making the System Work for You

MEE: In terms of that person who is just too proud to seek help? What would be the message that would get a parent to deal with their pride and say, “It's all right—go get these services.”

Dr. White: For the person who needs the services, but refuses to go, we can go back to the old kinds of interventions we used to use. Family intervention where the family gets to sit down and say, “Now, look, Grandma, your son was killed a year or so ago and you're still in bed every day. You're not eating, you're losing weight. You ain't taking your medicine. Now, Grandma, we know you loved that boy, but we've got to try to move along.”

The other way is the peer educator or trusted caregiver goes with them and sits in on the first [health] interview. Sign a confidentiality slip, whatever you need to sign so that they can sit right up in there with them. **UT**



needs, one parent said, "It would be easier to take care of our children if we had money." Another parent added that even though her household brings in three incomes, still "there's never enough money."

Lack of time is another stress producer for parents. "By the time I get home, it's time for bed," said one Atlanta parent. A Los Angeles parent said, "I don't really have a chance to do much with her [my daughter] because I commute." In addition to leaving too little time to spend with kids, work demands also mean not being able to take enough time for self. In order to squeeze a little time for themselves, these parents said they sometimes

take a day off from work or leave work early and do something for themselves while their children are still in school. Others said they've had to schedule everything in their lives—even quiet time.

Many of the parents spoke of having a serious problem with discipline. Common concerns ranged from "What's too little?" to "What's too much?" Many of the parents were having temper problems with their kids and said that episodes of misbehavior were fairly routine. Discipline, parents said, is especially important for African-American children, who need to learn the consequences of their behavior at an early age. As one parent explained, "In this day and age, with us being the color we are, there are consequences; so we teach our child that...you stick with your decision and live with the consequences."


Parents said they help each other out when they can, whether for babysitting, transportation, or just to give advice. To be good parents, most of the participants either relied on their "natural instincts" or on their mother, grandmother or other adults for coping strategies. One Los Angeles parent said she even discusses "how to be a good mother" with her peers.

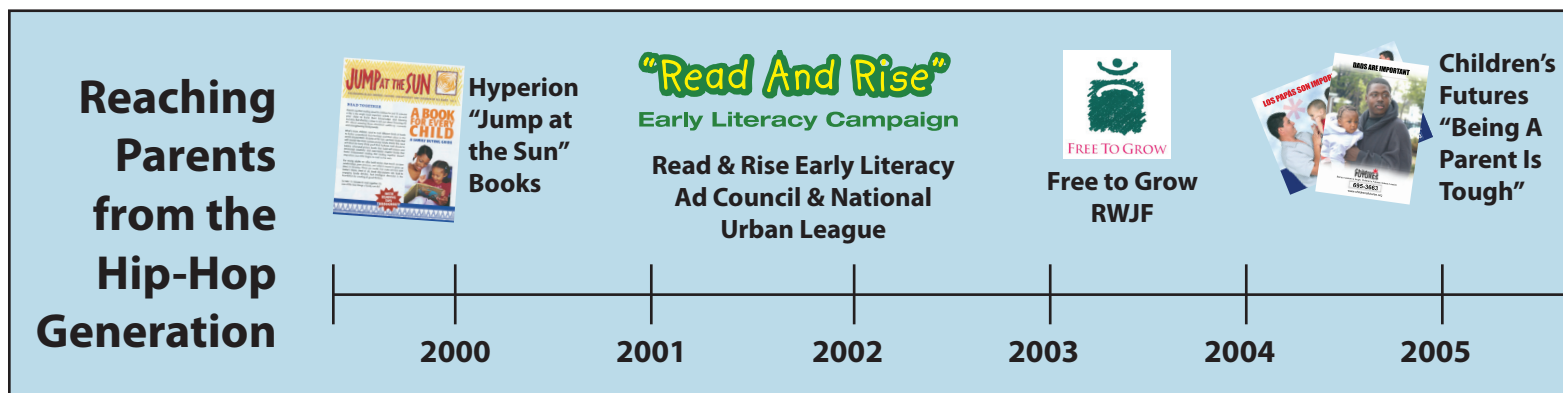
However, when coming to the aid of others, sensitivity is key. As a Philadelphia

parent explained, "You really don't want them to think you are being judgmental of their parenting skills, because they'll shut down on you." Instead, parents suggested that a person who genuinely wants to give advice should "throw some options out there, instead of saying 'Don't do this.'"

Every parent, even those who seem to have parenting down to a science, can use culturally-relevant advice, because most will admit that they need to know more about child development and even the "basics" of parenting. A good parent understands that parents are "going to make mistakes" and that they must constantly work on being an even better parent.

MEE supported the Center for Child Well-being in creating the Parenting in the Real World Toolkit (including a video) to support such efforts.

The kit and its multi-unit educational curriculum make child rearing less stressful and more effective. Created specifically with the daily realities of low-income African American parents in mind, it is a step-by-step guide that can be used by parenting programs and service providers in a variety of settings. **It helps parents understand that it is neither the money, nor necessarily the amount of time spent that children remember most, but the sincerity and love applied to every interaction.** 



Engaging Parents to Help Support Their Teens



Many of today's caregivers don't know how to talk to their teens – especially about intimate issues that can have life-and-death consequences. Aware that communication and education are essential to building positive relationships within families, MEE has conducted research that led us to offer a series of parent-driven workshops that provide caregivers struggling to raise the “hip-hop generation” with support and guidance — in a format that delivers information on *their* terms.

While parents are often willing to admit their needs, they are *not* willing to be preached to. Instead, MEE has found that parents, when asked, would prefer that their peers, not so-called “experts,” be the primary facilitators of their own workshops. They also want a setting in which parents can openly share what they've

learned—sometimes by trial and error—in raising teens. An interactive workshop experience allows parents to develop their own solutions to complex family issues, building their capacity for long-term problem-solving far beyond the workshop.

In MEE workshops, where parents lead many of the discussions, delivery of in-depth information and resources related to a particular topic is interspersed between parent “rap” sessions, role-playing, presentations, and other group activities. Other sponsors of workshops dealing with teen sexuality, could, for example, begin their workshop with an overview of basic sex education and provide information on strategies to get a dialogue started with one's child about choices and consequences. Then, parents would have an opportunity to role-play various scenarios

and share what has worked with their own children.

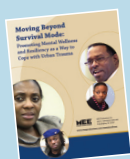
MEE has found that for parenting workshops to gain a positive reputation in a community, they need to be easy to get to, and should be offered in the evenings (preferably during the latter part of the week) or on Saturday afternoons. They should also include refreshments, incentives like door prizes and childcare options for participants. In addition, giveaways such as take-home “kits” with a cross-section of parent resources support not only knowledge-building, but also rapport-building. Parents who participate leave empowered and those who haven't, (but hear about it) eagerly await the arrival of the next workshop.

To fully impact a neighborhood, workshop promotion should appeal to both fathers and mothers. MEE has found that using the term “parents” on recruiting and promotional materials is limiting—predominantly attracting mothers. On the other hand, advertising that uses the words “mom” and “dad” is equally compelling to both sexes, making fathers more likely to participate. It is also important to specifically encourage other caregivers to attend. In addition, be careful about using phrases that are narrowly focused on a particular culture. Diverse or non-urban popula-

Continued on page 11



Durham Family Initiative



“Moving Beyond Survival Mode”



Children's Futures Electronic Resource Directory



SIDS Campaign for Parents of Infants



NIH/SBIR Parent-Teen Communications DVD

2006

2007

2008

2009

2010

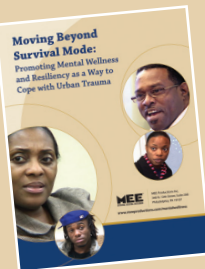
2011

2012

2013

The Impact of Urban Stress and Trauma

Moving Beyond Survival Mode: Promoting Mental Wellness and Resiliency as a Way to Cope with Urban Trauma



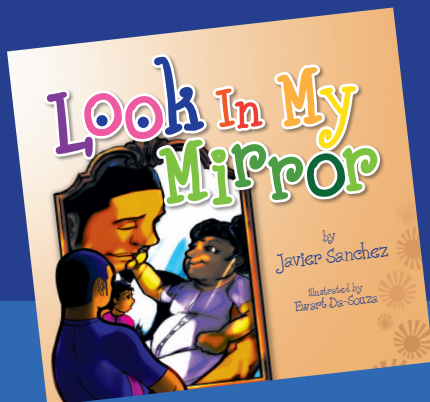
MEE's latest research and documentary, ***Moving Beyond Survival Mode: Promoting Mental Wellness and Resiliency as a Way to Cope with Urban Trauma***, explores how living in low-income, underserved communities puts individuals at risk for stress, ongoing trauma, depression and even mental health problems. This video showcases the voices of Americans who too often fall through the cracks. Young Black Americans who feel beaten down by the struggle to survive poverty, broken homes, child abuse, violent communities, poor schools, institutional racism, police harassment and other social ills-share their stories and their emotional "injuries." www.meeproductions.com/mentalwellness

The Path to Black Male Success

Successfully Mastering the Journey for African American Male Youth



Successfully Mastering the Journey presents one of the nation's top scholars, Dr. Joseph White, delivering a culturally-relevant perspective on the barriers African American men face in fulfilling their life dreams and on what it takes to raise healthy Black males. Dr. White, a pioneering scholar often referred to as one of the "founding fathers" of Black psychology, is a renowned author and community activist and is Professor Emeritus of Psychology and Psychiatry at the University of California, Irvine. His down-to-earth yet inspiring presentation examines the four major challenges facing young Black males (ages 8-25) in America. It also offers solutions for helping them to rediscover their inner strengths, by focusing on improvisation, resilience, spirituality, emotional vitality and a sense of humor. www.meeproductions.com



For fathers who sometimes struggle with knowing what to say to their daughters...

This book can speak volumes.

The book is a resource fathers—whether or not they are single parents—can use to give their daughters a positive identity and healthy self-esteem at a very critical time in their life.

We know that the media constantly bombards our young girls with conflicting and often negative messages about how they should behave and what they

should look like. They need counter-messages about unconditional, positive love from the "first men" in their lives. For fathers who sometimes struggle with knowing what to say, this book can speak volumes. We believe that "Look In My Mirror" can be a strong first step towards establishing a healthy, open and loving relationship between fathers and daughters—one that will last a lifetime.

Order Online: www.meeproductions.com/mymirror

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Communications Inc.
Teaching Today's Generation with Tomorrow's Inspiration

MEE
MOTIVATIONAL EDUCATIONAL ENTERTAINMENT

MEE Parenting Resources

Websites



meeproductions.com/plan



giveyourbabyspace.com (SIDS)



iamthedifferenceDC.org



meeproductions.com/mentalwellness

Early Childhood Development



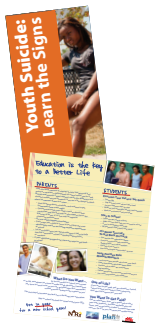
- SIDS Campaign for Parents of Infants
- Blueprint for a Safer Philadelphia: Early Reading Audio PSAs
- Secondhand Smoke Campaign: Maternal Smoking Print Campaign – City of Philadelphia Dept. of Health (www.smokefreephilly.org)

Tweens/Middle School



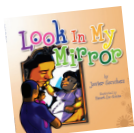
- Be On The Safe Side TV PSAs, Print Materials, Workshops for Parents and Video & Guide A (Abstinence)
- The Blunt Truth Guides (for Parents in English and Spanish)
- Smoke Free Three (Tween) Anti-Smoking TV PSA

Teens/High School



- Be On The Safe Side TV PSAs, Print Materials, Workshops for Parents and Video & Guide B (Sexually Active/Condom Use)
- SBIR/NIMH: Parent-Teen Communications
- Toolkit for Parents & Providers: Moving Beyond Survival Mode (Mental Wellness/Coping Skills)
- PLAN (Parent Leadership in Action Network)
- DC-DMH Parent Information on Youth Suicide Prevention (www.iamthedifferencedc.org)
- ISOL: Teen Dating Violence (Against Black Girls)
- Education Brochure (Tips for Parents & Teens)

Girls



- Children's Book: Look Into My Mirror
- Oops Book (Puberty Milestones of Girls)
- ISOL: Teen Dating Violence (Against Black Girls)

Boys

- Parent DVD: Successfully Mastering the Journey (Dr. White)
- MEE's B-MEE Wellness Postcards (Positive Coping Skills)

Reading/Literacy

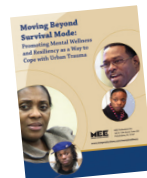
- Read & Rise (The Ad Council/Urban League)
- Blueprint for a Safer Philadelphia: Early Reading Audio PSAs

Sexual Health



- Be On The Safe Side TV PSAs, Print Materials, Workshops for Parents, Videos and Guides
- The Price of Sex (Black Youth Sexuality)
- SBIR/NIMH: Parent-Teen Communications

Violence Prevention/Mental Wellness



- ISOL: Teen Dating Violence (Violence Against Black Girls)
- Toolkit for Parents & Providers: Moving Beyond Survival Mode (Mental Wellness/Coping Skills)
- PLAN (Parent Leadership in Action Network)
- MEE's B-MEE Wellness Postcards

Obesity Prevention



- STEPS Brochure (English & Spanish) for Adult Women/Parents
- Go, Slow, Whoa!! Food Choices Handout

Education

- www.meeproductions.com/education/ (School Success)
- Education Brochure (Tips for Parents & Teens)

Substance Abuse



- The Blunt Truth Guides (for Parents in English and Spanish)
- Secondhand Smoke Campaign: Maternal Smoking Print Campaign – City of Philadelphia Dept. of Health (www.smokefreephilly.org)

To View/Download These and Other Materials, Please Go To: www.MEEProductions.com/plan

Insights: Making the Educational System Work

Making sure their children get the best education possible is a priority issue on the minds of parents across the socioeconomic spectrum. But the challenges of preparing children for careers and long-term success become even more pronounced in underfunded school systems, schools that fail their children, and municipalities that place a low priority on educating low-income urban communities.

In recent years, MEE has conducted national qualitative, focus group research with African American and Latino parents/guardians of school-age youth. We set out to understand their attitudes towards public education, thoughts about the education reform movement and their understanding of their role in successfully navigating their children to and through college. Here are some highlights of what we heard:

Parents appreciated the option of having school choice; however,

sending children to schools outside their community had drawbacks and posed challenges for families.


Parents who supported school choice believed that it would make all schools more competitive and possibly even reduce the dropout rate. They also felt that, due to greater competition, schools would put forth more effort in making positive changes. For the most part, however, their hope has not yet borne fruit. Other parents explained that although school choice has its positives, it also has its share of drawbacks. They noted that “authentic” school choice doesn’t exist because the majority of “good” schools are not in their communities. These schools have limited open slots, so their child’s education is often subjected to the vagaries of a school lottery. Even when accepted, going to those schools may require extra travel, time and effort that not all parents or children have the ability to make. Parents also said that school choice has adversely impacted the fiber of their community; when stu-

dents choose to go to schools outside their district or neighborhood, funds are transferred to the new district, leaving the old district depleted of funds to effectively run the schools.

Parents want to know how to support their child’s academic progress outside of school.

This includes what parents can do at home that complements what children are doing in their classrooms. Many realize that they are “the first teacher,” and that being involved at home provides that extra push that many children need. Parents mentioned that it is important to be their child’s cheerleader and to encourage their interests and keep them motivated. It’s important, they said, to make sure children are being prepared to handle the academic requirements from one grade level to the next.

Parents felt that engaged parents are the key to a child’s successful education.

Parents felt that a critical success factor for the successful education of children is the active participation of parents in the education process, especially at home. Participants lamented the dysfunctional attitude that many parents allegedly had towards education and school. They said too many parents believe that their responsibility ends with dropping off their child at school and picking them up at the end of the day. While some accused other parents of not caring, others felt that disengaged parents were mainly not informed of the importance of their role in their children’s education. Many schools fail to emphasize parents’ responsibility in their child’s education and lack a school environment that invites parent participation. Instead, many parents feel that schools don’t want them to get involved, unless there is a problem. Parents need to feel that taking action is not only their right, but also their responsibility. Knowing that they can effectively advocate for more resources will give more parents the confidence to speak up and to take what they perceive to be the “risk” of rejection. 

Tips for Parents to Support Achievement

After the long summer of staying up late, hanging out and going on vacations, shifting back to school mode can be hard, for kids and parents. Parent support can be the difference in a student’s academic performance. Here are a few things to think about as summer draws to a close....

- Start thinking about schedules and routines to get homework done every night.
- Communicate with your child’s teacher about their curriculum and the best way to also support his or her learning at home; it’s a sure way to improve classroom performance.
- Be your child’s biggest cheerleader.
- Encourage your child to come to you if they get overwhelmed by work or are having negative experiences at school.
- Let your child know you will do whatever it takes to help him/her succeed in school, including finding tutors or mentors.
- If your child has dropped out, there are ways to get back in school.



MEE's Upcoming DVD and Multimedia Toolkit Support Improved Parent-Teen Communication

MEE is developing an innovative new multimedia project for eventual commercial distribution, with the focus on improving communication between parents and their teen children. This two-year project is funded by the National Institutes of Health, through a Small Business Innovation Research grants program. The foundation of the project content is a face-to-face workshop (Project STYLE) that was developed by MEE's academic partners, psychologists at Rhode Island Hospital/Brown University.

MEE is developing an interactive DVD package, a customized Website and user guides/workbooks for both parents and adolescents. A new 2013 video production will enhance the short film MEE shot in 2008. The additional footage will expand the educational elements needed to reduce sexual risk behavior and substance use among urban African-American youth. Improving parent-adolescent interaction and communication, along



with how to do effective parental monitoring will be addressed in the new video content.

In 2013, MEE will develop and test the supporting materials for the DVD, along with the new video content on increasing parent and adolescent knowledge of HIV/STD information, substance use and adolescent-risk

reduction. Product-feasibility testing will be done in both Philadelphia and Providence, RI with dyads of African American parents and their teens. After it is finalized later this year, look for MEE's multi-platform marketing efforts to get our latest effective parenting product into homes and community-based organizations where it is most needed. [U](#)

Engaging Parents continued...

tions may more readily identify with broader terms such as "new generation teens" rather than the "hip-hop" generation, for example.

The bottom line: getting parents of teens motivated and ready to deal with youth issues works best when you bring parents together collectively. Parents need a supportive place where they can share both the joys and challenges of raising teenagers in the midst of today's realities. Workshops that aim to get parents to talk to their children in an open and knowledgeable manner must create a space where parents themselves are heard and respected. [U](#)

MEE's Parent Leadership in Action Network Micro-site

<http://www.meeproductions.com/plan>

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