

## **Determining the Effectiveness of the "Parenting Wisely" Program in Wichita, Kansas Evaluator: Thomas S. Parish, Ph.D.**

The goal of the "Parenting Wisely" Program is to teach enhanced (1) communication skills, (2) assertive discipline techniques, and (3) supervisory skills to parents. The program is contained on a CD-ROM, which can be played on a multimedia computer. In all, "Parenting Wisely" includes nine case studies, followed by three possible ways of dealing with the situations presented in the case studies. Parents choose a response, and then see a video describing how their choices would likely work, plus get feedback regarding the advantages and the disadvantages associated with their choices. Parents are also asked to answer questions after each of their responses about the ideas and skills presented in each case study. Parents can choose to have the "Parenting Wisely" Program presented silently or read aloud to them by the computer. Either way, the entire process generally takes less than three hours to complete.

The purpose of the present study is to determine whether or not the "Parenting Wisely" Program, as presented to a group of Wichita public school parents, effectively taught better ways to parent. In order to achieve this end, the present study was divided into three parts:

### **Method**

**Part 1** required the parents, i.e., participants, in this study to complete a multiple choice test concerning specific points of knowledge regarding how to effectively communicate with their children, and how to discipline them too.

**Part 2** provided the participants with an opportunity to view the "Parenting Wisely" Program, as well as interact with trained professionals addressing the matter of what they could do to parent more wisely.

**Part 3** required the parent participants to once again complete the same questionnaire that they filled out in Part 1, in order to determine whether or not the "Parenting Wisely" Program did, indeed, impart important parenting information to the participants, and whether or not these participants could demonstrate this increased knowledge through significant improvement in the number of correct responses they chose on the questionnaire employed in the present study.

### **Results/Discussion**

A t-test was employed to compare the participants' total pretest score ( $x = 16.64$ ,  $n = 64$ ) with their total posttest score ( $x = 19.70$ ,  $n = 64$ ), and it was found that, generally speaking, that they improved significantly ( $t = -3.161$ ,  $df = 63$ ,  $p < .005$ ) as a result of their participation in this "Parenting Wisely" Program.

Before anyone celebrates too much, however, it should be noted that this significant overall improvement achieved by comparing total pretest scores with total posttest scores did not always prevail when pre-post comparisons were made across all individual items on the questionnaire. More specifically, as seen in Table 1, massive improvements are not universally found in

participants' knowledge of correct parenting techniques. In fact, there were only **nine** questions that were answered correctly significantly more often on the posttest questionnaire than on the pretest questionnaire (see items 2, 4, 7, 8, 10, 18, 19, 20, & 32). Otherwise, either no change occurred in the participants' answers (i.e., those who got it right on the pretest also got it right on the posttest, or those who got it wrong on the pretest also got it wrong on the posttest, i.e., ties), or, in some instances the participants were actually found to have answered the question right more often on the pretest, but then got it wrong on the posttest after having been presented the "Parenting Wisely" Program (see items 5, 12, 15, & 17). Notably, however, none of these reversals in direction was able to reach a statistically significant level of difference.\*

The bottom line, then, is that the "Parenting Wisely" Program in Wichita, Kansas, did achieve a moderate level of success, and that's applaudable, but there certainly remains some areas in need of greater improvement where significant change was not found, and effort should be made to improve in these areas too. Of course, what makes this task so doable are the questions on the questionnaire that were not addressed correctly and therefore denote areas where progress still needs to be made. For as we attend to providing parents with answers to these questions, these parents should more likely be able to parent more wisely.

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\* It should be noted that several of the parent trainers conducting "Parenting Wisely" trainings indicated, upon reviewing the pre/posttest instrument as parents were being trained, several concerns regarding somewhat confusing wording and/or potentially incorrect recommended answers to some of the questions on the questionnaire, which could attribute at least partially to the findings reported here rather than an actual lack of knowledge gained by participants. The instrument was not modified even after the concerns raised by the parent trainers because: (1) the instrument was utilized and scored as provided by the program developer from his previous research on the program and pre/posttest instrument; (2) the concerns raised by the parent trainers did not occur until a large number of trainings had already been conducted; and (3) revising the instrument after trainings had already been conducted would create a confounding variable in the program evaluation.

## Table 1

### Summary Table of Negative Differences, Positive Differences, and Ties Found in Pretest and Posttest Comparisons of Answers to the "Parenting Wisely" Questionnaire

**Key:** Negative differences reflect correct answers on the pretest, but incorrect answers on the posttest.

Positive differences reflect incorrect answers on the pretest, but correct answers on the posttest.

Ties reflect the same answers on the pretest and posttest, i.e., no change.

Question	Neg. Diff.	Pos. Diff.	Ties	Level of Sign.
1. What might be the disadvantage of discussing a problem when you are angry?	5	5	54	ns
2. What is the best reason to use active listening?	4	16	44	p<.05
3. In disciplining a child, what should be included along with punishment?	9	13	42	ns
4. What is the most important part of giving a chore?	3	12	49	p<.05
5. What is most important in assertive discipline	15	9	40	ns
6. What is most likely to happen if a parent does not follow through with punishment?	7	8	49	ns
7. When might a family discussion of a problem NOT be a good idea?	5	16	43	p<.05
8. When a parent does not state clear expectations about rules, but is upset when children don't behave, how may the child feel?	2	15	47	p<.005
9. What happens when parents are consistent in giving consequences?	3	10	51	ns
10. What are the components of "Contingency Management"?	7	20	37	p<.05
11. What happens if a parent monitors a child's schoolwork?	1	0	63	ns
12. When you first find out that your child is doing poorly at school, what should you do first?	12	8	44	ns
13. What is the long-term result of motivating children by yelling at them?	4	7	53	ns
14. What often happens when a parent forbids a teen to see a particular friend?	4	10	50	ns
15. What happens when you compare siblings to each other?	3	2	59	ns
16. Is it important to explain to our children exactly what they have done wrong before punishing?	3	6	55	ns
17. The main reason that parents yell at their children is . . .	3	2	59	ns
18. After assigning a chore that takes several steps, what should a parent do if the child does not do a good job?	1	10	53	p<.05
19. How should a parent handle repeated, angry "back talk" . . . ?	2	17	45	p<.001
20. Why is role modeling a powerful long-term way of teaching children proper behavior?	3	12	49	p<.05
21. What is the purpose of an "I Statement"?	3	7	54	ns
22. What are the main advantages of "Contracting" for adolescents?	7	11	46	ns
23. Which of the following is an "I Statement"?	10	10	44	ns
24. If your child lied to you . . . what would be a good "I Statement" to use?	5	11	48	ns

25. When a child angrily says "I don't want anyone coming into my room!" good "Active Listening" would be if you said . . .	8	13	43	ns
26. What is the advantage of having both parents involved with a child's homework problem?	3	2	59	ns
27. What happens when parents give punishments that are severe?	9	16	39	ns
28. Close supervision of our children when they spend time with friends has which advantage?	2	6	56	ns
29. What are the main elements of "Contracting"?	3	5	56	ns
30. What are common reasons why stepfathers get involved with disciplining their wife's children?	9	9	46	ns
31. If we need to correct our child when he/she is with friends, what should we do?	4	8	52	ns
32. To help our children to know which behavior to change, it is important for us to be . . .	1	8	55	p<.05
33. When one of our children continually reports that he or she is being hit by our other child, what should we do?	4	6	54	ns
34. When we talk about the positive motive behind someone's behavior, the effect is to . . .	5	9	50	ns