



Raising a thinking child

“There is much less yelling, arguing and fighting. I talk more with my children rather than just telling them what to do.”

—Parent participant in *Raising a Thinking Child* program

Wisconsin’s prosperity is rooted in the problem-solving skill and innovation of its people. Children who can think critically are the base of a productive and responsible next generation of employees, parents and community members. Skills such as critical thinking, impulse control, problem-solving and conflict resolution can be taught early in life by children’s most influential teachers—their parents. Parenting programs that build these capacities in young children set the stage for preventing juvenile delinquency, school problems and substance use.

Finding the best program for Wisconsin

University of Wisconsin-Extension Family Living educators sought out the most effective “brain-building” programs from around the world for Wisconsin families to use with their young children. After careful review, *Raising a Thinking Child* developed by Dr. Myrna B. Shure from Drexel University was chosen. *Raising a Thinking Child* trains parents to teach their children *how*—not *what*—to think.

Studies of *Raising a Thinking Child* show that training mothers of four-year-olds to teach problem-solving skills to their children at home can improve child behavior. Children in these studies were better able to wait for what they wanted; share and take turns; and were less easily upset in frustrating situations. The most with-

drawn children became more outgoing, assertive and less fearful of social situations. Children trained by their mothers to use problem-solving skills and conflict resolution at home also used these skills at school.

Mothers in the *Raising a Thinking Child* program improved their own ability to solve child-based problems by learning to think through problems their children might encounter. As a result, they were better able to guide their children to think for themselves when real problems arose.

A group of UW-Extension Family Living educators, working directly with creator Myrna Shure, updated and adapted *Raising a Thinking Child* specifically for Wisconsin families.

Results

Over the past eight years, Family Living educators and specialists have brought the benefits of *Raising a Thinking Child* to Wisconsin families by:

- Conducting annual statewide trainings for more than 120 family professionals on how to teach the program, including staff from family resource centers, Head Start, pre-K and elementary schools, childcare centers, public health and social services.
- Securing partners to promote, fund and teach the program.
- Translating the materials for use by Spanish-speaking families.

In 2014 alone, *Raising a Thinking Child* reached more than 100 parents from nine counties.

Family Living Programs Impact Report

Parents gain skills

A total of 106 parents were surveyed at the end of the *Raising a Thinking Child* class series.

As a result of the *Raising a Thinking Child* program, up to 90% of participating parents said they changed in the following ways:

- They now guide their child to think of alternative solutions to problem situations.
- They are better equipped to teach their child how to express and control anger and frustration appropriately.
- They take time to find out their child's view of a problem.
- They help their child learn to identify the potential consequences of their actions for themselves.

Parents felt better able to control their anger and frustration with their child and to develop their child's ability to recognize their own and others' feelings.

"I feel more in control of situations, whereas in the past I struggled to find solutions. This class has given us ... tools we weren't aware that we had available."

"There is much less yelling, arguing and fighting. I talk more WITH my children rather than just talking at them."

Children's behavior improves

As a result of *Raising a Thinking Child*, more than half of parents noted increases in their child's ability to:

- Show concern for other children.
- Help other children.
- Avoid calling other children names.
- Take turns with other children.
- Wait and be patient.

These skills are part of the foundation children need to be successful members of their communities.

Family life is better

Parents report that their home life is less stressful, communication is more effective, and there is less yelling and more consideration for others' feelings.

In fact, many parents found *Raising a Thinking Child* so useful that they reported sharing what they learned with spouses, other children, friends and even co-workers.

"Everyone gets along better. Their children's behavior has improved at home and in public."



Lasting change

Did the changes to parent and child behavior last after the program ended? Six months after completing the program, 29 parents, or 60% of the participants from four program sessions, agreed to be interviewed.

- After six months parents were even better at teaching their children to think about consequences and alternatives.
- Parents maintained their improved ability to help their children express or control anger or frustration.

"I appreciate how parents can help children think more about alternatives and explore their options. My children come to wiser decisions..."

Participants in *Raising a Thinking Child* programs changed their parenting in ways that helped develop their children's problem-solving and critical thinking skills. Using the techniques taught in *Raising a Thinking Child*, parents can help their children learn the hard skills of flexible thinking and everyday problem-solving. They also develop soft skills, such as dependability, discipline, and the capacity to work with others.

By bringing *Raising a Thinking Child* to Wisconsin, Family Living Programs is providing a resource that can serve as an asset to children throughout their lives.

To learn more, contact:

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