

THINK POSITIVE

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A toddler throws a tantrum in the grocery store parking lot. A kindergartner refuses to put on her pajamas. A 4-year-old's favorite new word is an emphatic "no!" These are all behaviors that most parents have faced at some point in their child's development. These are also all problems that Triple P — short for the Positive Parenting Program — aims to help parents deal with. Triple P is not a typical parenting class. It's a public-health initiative being implemented across the region — and around the world.

Since the grant for the program came through in June, Triple P's program coordinator at Buncombe County Health & Human Services, **Deanna LaMotte**, has trained 70 professionals across 25 private, public and nonprofit agencies in Western North Carolina since the summer. Providers range from child care staff members to pediatricians to church leaders. "Because it's meant to be a public-health approach to parenting, it's not just a parenting class," explains LaMotte. "Triple P has a whole range of interventions or ways that parents can interact with the program. The idea is that there is something in the community that's available and accessible to any parent who might want it."



Deanna LaMotte, Triple P Coordinator, with her 5-year-old son, Mason. Photo by Nathan Metcalf

The target age group is birth to 6 years, as specified in the grant, and there is much more emphasis placed on teaching desired behaviors than there is on reacting to bad behavior, LaMotte says. For example, a student who refuses to do his homework might benefit from a designated area and time frame to complete schoolwork. In all cases, parents are presented with multiple options and are encouraged to choose what would work best for their child and schedule. Unlike a parenting class, Triple P can be implemented in various ways, including group discussions, brief one-on-one meetings, take-home tip sheets for parents and longer, in-depth sessions.

Perhaps one of the more important aspects of Triple P is the acknowledgment that all parents could use a little help, says **Susanne Walker-Wilson**, bilingual early intervention specialist and trained Triple P provider at F I R S T (Parent Center) in Asheville, a resource center for parents of children with special needs. "I feel like as a culture, we've kind of done a head trip on ourselves with the sense that we're all supposed to know how to be good parents from the beginning," says Walker-Wilson, "and not just loving parents, because we *do* know that — but how to be effective parents with our children's behaviors. ... It's something that's completely appropriate for us to be teaching one another as our children grow throughout their childhood."

Triple P also aims to empower the parent, she says, acknowledging that parents know more about their family and their kid than a teacher or therapist. "One of the things that's unique about Triple P is that it provides a great deal of respect and also choice for the parent," she says. "So the parent is identifying what they experience as problem behavior, there are lots of education and options of how they might want to intervene, and they get the choice of which option is going to make sense for them."

Norma Brown, Latino outreach coordinator at the Family Resource Center at Emma, adds that the program has been embraced by the Spanish-speaking community, thanks in large part to the fact that Triple P offers most of its literature and resources in Spanish. "The main motivation for many immigrant parents to come to this country are their children, therefore the motivation is already there, and it is a very powerful one," Brown says. "Triple P offers all the material in

Spanish, and the parents I already served had wonderful remarks and reported improvements after four sessions.” Some of those issues include general disobedience, homework problems and tantrums, she says.

While the program originated in Australia and has been tweaked and tested for the past 30 years, it only recently gained ground in WNC, LaMotte says, when a Centers for Disease Control and Prevention trial in South Carolina was published in 2009. The study found that when Triple P was implemented on a communitywide scale, “not only did those families have success with their children’s behavior,” she says, “as a community, the rates of substantiated child abuse and hospitalizations for child maltreatment and out-of-home placements all decreased significantly.”

But LaMotte is quick to point out that the program isn’t necessarily geared toward at-risk families. “I’m a parent of a 5-year-old, and I have lots of friends who are parents and are wonderful, wonderful parents,” says LaMotte, “but if you ask any parent in the world honestly, if they know everything about parenting and never have problems, nobody is going to agree to that. Every parent needs help sometimes.”

LaMotte adds that Triple P brings down the barriers that might stand in a parent’s way of seeking that help. This includes destigmatizing and normalizing the need for guidance.

“In our society ... I can admit it to my best friend that I don’t know what’s going on with my kid,” LaMotte says. “I can’t really admit that to my doctor or my kid’s school. There’s a lot of taboo around saying, ‘I don’t really have this under control.’”

While still in its early stages, LaMotte hopes that the public-health approach will allow the method to grow and be embraced by parents in WNC. “From personal experience, I can say that these strategies aren’t difficult. It’s not asking you to rearrange your life. ... Any parent can use these strategies, and they really do work.”

[For more information on Triple P in Buncombe County](#)

- Visit www.triplep-parenting.net (find parenting tips, real parents’ testimonials about the program, a Triple P EVENT calendar, and a MAP of local providers).
- Contact Deanna LaMotte, Triple P Program Coordinator, at deanna.lamotte@buncombecounty.org or 828-351-8098 (get information about the county initiative or about hosting a session at your business, church, or community; get help finding the right provider or Triple P level for you)