

Parenting

New-parent-infant relationship enhanced with Perinatal Coaching

By Shirlee Idon
staff writer

Baby needs shoes, yes. And baby needs love.

If that sounds like oversimplification, it really isn't.

A new program called Perinatal Coaching is developing because the birth of a child doesn't instantly make its parents experts.

Beatrice Rowe, coordinator of the program with June Dreznick, puts it this way:

"A new parent doesn't know it may be more important to get down on hands and knees with the kids than to dust every day."

And Ms. Dreznick knows that moms have to learn to communicate with new offspring.

"There are families where people just don't talk to one another very much. They have to learn it's vital," she said.

Both women are Southfield residents. Mrs. Rowe has several decades of experience in volunteer programs, a teaching degree, and formerly worked with disturbed children at the Orchards. Ms. Dreznick has a masters degree in social work.

Family and Children's Services of Oakland County is the program sponsor, "a non-profit, private program supported by private charitable dollars," Mrs. Rowe said.

"OUR AGENCY looks at each stage of life, and we know that all change is difficult. The first crisis is often the first birth, no matter what the situation. It can be a great time."

In an attempt to make it a wonderful time for new parents' and children alike, the agency decided to train community people as coaches to young families.

"We help all kinds of families," Mrs.

Rowe said. "They don't have to be high risk."

Hospitals refer the families to the agency. The only criteria are the mother must be in her seventh month and it must be a first birth.

Participating hospitals at this time are Providence, Pontiac Osteopathic, St. Joseph Mercy and Pontiac General.

The program grew from the growing concern over child abuse and neglect that began around 1974, Mrs. Rowe said.

"In 1978, a state committee was formed by Harriette Cooper, who became its first director."

"She's still with the agency."

Ms. Cooper recruited Beatrice Rowe, asking her for help in developing the program.

"THAT WAS in October 1979. It's still fairly new, but we know it works. What's exciting is that it works with volunteers."

"The volunteer coach stays with the family through the birth and the first year of the child's life. What we do is to help build the confidence of these people."

"Coaches can nurture the relationship between the expectant mother and father. A special effort is made to involve the father if one is in the picture."

The coaches come from many backgrounds, she said. Some are non-professionals who have only their own experience to offer.

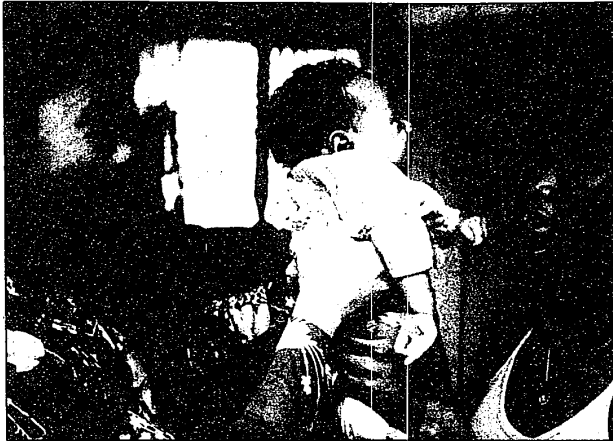
"We see prevention of child abuse and neglect at one end of the spectrum and enhancement of a special time at the other."

Perinatal coaches are trained in a sophisticated manner for several weeks. Only after the training do they decide whether they want to coach a family.

"Many of them work full time, but it's an easy thing to work out since coaching is only for an hour a week."

"A coach only has one family to help and sees them in the family home."

BOTH MALE and female coaches are part of the program, which is open



Baby Johnny Parker Jr. and his mother, Pearllean Dreznick for Family and Children Services of Oakland County.

to anyone in Oakland County. The fee is low and often are waived when necessary, she said.

"Anyone who wants to have a coach or be a coach can simply call the agency at 544-4004 and ask for me or for June Dreznick," Mrs. Rowe said.

Once a coach is trained and working with a family, he continues to get supervision and support from the agency.

"The coach brings the agency up to date after every visit." The coaches don't give therapy, she said. "And our families don't need therapy."

Before a coach is assigned, the agency asks each family for help. Then the two coordinators match the coach and the family.

Southfield coaches currently in the program include: Peggy Frank, Carol Gruber, Ann Moss, Ann Skalski, and Dayle Weingarden.

Others are Linda Smith and Marjorie McCulloch of Lathrup Village, Suzanne Gordon of Farmington Hills and Faja Ruta of Troy.

Birmingham-Bloomfield participants include: Nancy Adams, Debi Cain, Annette Chajes, Cecy Copeland, Charlot De Roven, Susan Gross, Myra Jacobs, Cheryl Kirsch, Diane Lever,

Janet Miller, Dorothy Pfaff, Bill Phillips and Cathy Witt.

"Some coaches want to work with singles, others married. We work with blended families where people are living in one household, too."

The perinatal coaches work with families by encouraging attendance at childbirth preparation classes, encouraging breast feeding, where possible, teaching what a new baby is like and talking about the feelings of a new father or mother.

"WE WANT both the mother and father to feel confident in their new caretaker role. We're now on our third group of coaches, and we have coaches who were once clients themselves."

A great deal of knowledge about child development wasn't known even a generation ago, she said.

"We used to think babies didn't see or hear for a few weeks, now we know newborn reflexes are very sophisticated."

"We encourage certain play to reveal sight, hearing and reflexes. When a baby keeps dropping something over and over, he is testing out a development stage. Parents should learn to accept this."

At one time or another, every parents wants to give the children away, she said.

"What's vital is that parents realize this is natural."

"The zero to 3 age is crucial for baby. It's when he either learns to trust this world or not. He'll pull back if he fails to adjust, and babies die from failure to thrive."

People who fail to develop relationships lack this ability because of life experiences in the early years, she said.

"The psychopathic criminal is the extreme."

The agency also helps parents form groups in a Parent-Infant Learning Program to give one another support.

"We now have groups for singles, blended families and parents contemplating divorce. And we're inviting expectant grandparents to meet and share."

In an age when everyone is pulling back from any kind of human service, it's good to see this agency and the United Way invest in a preventative program.

Up to now, no one dealt with these beginning years."

"The zero to 3 age is crucial for baby. It's when he either learns to trust this world or not. He'll pull back if he fails to adjust, and babies die from failure to thrive."

—Beatrice Rowe



Childbirth educators offer more options for families

By Judith Berne
staff writer

Two area women are taking childbirth education out of hospitals and doctors' offices and offering classes through community agencies.

Annette Hill of West Bloomfield and Ellen Harper of Farmington Hills recently formed Professional Associates in Childbirth Education Inc. — PACE.

"It is a challenge to remain in the community and still maintain a professional group," said Mrs. Hill, a community health nurse for Oakland County from 1972-77. Mrs. Hill has taught nursing at the college level.

"Our philosophy is to deliver family-centered childbirth education in a professional, knowledgeable manner and to meet the goals and needs established by the childbirth consumer as well as those recognize by the medical and nursing professions," she said.

She teamed up with Mrs. Harper, a social worker by training, who has administered Lamaze classes. Mrs. Harper is secretary-treasurer of the newly formed company and the only one of the 15-member staff who does not teach.

All instructors are professionals in nursing and education, Mrs. Hill said. Beyond that, each has experienced a Lamaze birth and breastfed a child.

THEIR CLASSES in Lamaze and Caesarean childbirth education and newborn care are offered to expectant couples through community education, parks and recreation and "Y's" throughout the suburban Detroit area. Although the general seven-week childbirth series focuses on the Lamaze method, "We talk about all options in the Detroit area," Mrs. Hill said.

Specifically, the Lamaze method teaches mind over matter, advocating that a sense of discomfort can be blocked by a conditioned response, Mrs. Harper said.

"Consumerism has come into all areas," Mrs. Hill said. "Our job is to talk about everything that may or may not happen — not to make a decision for them."

Instructors discuss ways of giving birth, communication with the physician as an informed consumer, stages of labor and delivery, and signs of impending labor.

Other subjects covered include the role of the coach, relaxation and breathing during labor, breast feeding, post-partum adjustments — including how a baby may change the husband-wife relationship, and how to choose a pediatrician.

THE FOUR-WEEK course for couples who will have their babies by Caesarean section emphasizes their options, the Caesarean procedure and how the surgical procedure may be transformed into a family-centered birth.

In Caesarean is a birth. The fathers can bond (make physical contact) with the baby right away," Mrs. Hill said.

"The baby knows the mother right away. But the father can start the whole process."

The two-week class on newborn care includes health and development, breast feeding and how to continue breast feeding if you return to work,

choosing child care and selecting educational, safe toys.

A two-week "refresher" class for parents who have one child focuses on childbirth breathing and exercises.

PROponents of the Lamaze birth method no longer have to fight to have father in the delivery room, Mrs. Harper said.

"These things are battles already won. It's a matter of upgrading the quality of the experience."

"Women still go into labor not knowing what is happening to them," Mrs. Hill said. "It can be very frightening."

Professional Associates in Childbirth Education classes are offered locally by: West Bloomfield Community Education, Farmington Hills Parks and Recreation, Farmington Hills Mercy Center and Southfield Continuing Education.

The classes are also available through Livonia Community Education, Plymouth Parks and Recreation, Garden City Osteopathic Hospital, Whittier School in Westland and Walled Lake Community Education and the Redford Northwest YWCA.



JOHN STANO/staff photographer

Ellen Harper (above) and Annette Hill with Laurie (at right) believe in making childbirth education available wherever possible.



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—Beatrice Rowe

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