

Stopping the Beating of Black Children: CICC's Program and the Wisdom of Dr. Stacey Patton

The Center for the Improvement of Child Caring's Effective Black Parenting Program is now the most widely used parenting program in African American communities throughout the United States.

Over 4000 instructors from 1500 agencies, departments, schools and churches, in 40 states and DC, have completed workshops to learn to deliver classes in the program's parenting skills and basic ideas. It is estimated that as many as a million parents and their families have already benefited from these classes.

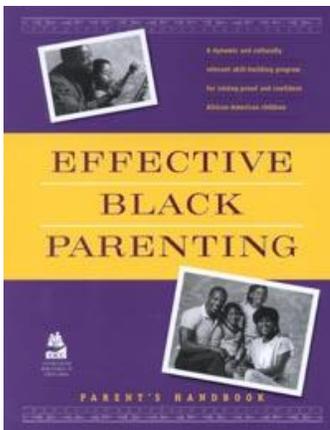
This essay outlines what is taught in the 15 class sessions of the program. It conveys how CICC created the program in the late 1970s under research and development grants from such agencies as the National Institute of Mental Health and the National Institute on Drug Abuse.

Then it relates these actions to the recent writings of journalist Stacey Patton (2007, 2017a, 2017b).

Dr. Patton's profound work serves to reinforce the program's view that 250 years of slavery left a cruel legacy. It made the beating of black children seem like a cultural imperative. Her writings have brought a new sense of urgency to extending the reach of the program beyond where it is today.

CICC's Effective Black Parenting Program

Here is an outline of all the skills, strategies and special topics that are taught in the entire Effective Black Parenting Program:



- 1. General Parenting Strategies**
 - A. Social Learning Ideas
 - B. Pinpointing and Describing Behavior
 - C. Charting Behavior
 - D. The Thinking Parent's Approach
 - E. Family Rules Are Like A Coin and Family Rules Guidelines
 - F. Children's Developing Abilities
 - G. Children's Thinking Stages and the Developmental Swing between Belonging and Independence

- 2. Specific Parenting Skills Taught in a Culturally-Sensitive Manner, Using African-American Proverbs**
 - A. Effective Praise
 - B. Mild Social Disapproval
 - C. Ignoring
 - D. Time Out

E. The Point System

3. **Culturally-Specific Parenting Strategies**

- A. Achievement Orientation to Parenting: The Pyramid of Success for Black Children
- B. Traditional Black Discipline vs. Modern Black Self-Discipline
- C. Pride in Blackness: Positive Communication about Heritage, Coping with Racism, Avoiding Black Self-Disparagement
- D. Finding Special Times with All of Our Children: Chit-Chat Times
- E. Using African Proverbs to show the cultural roots of what is taught in the program

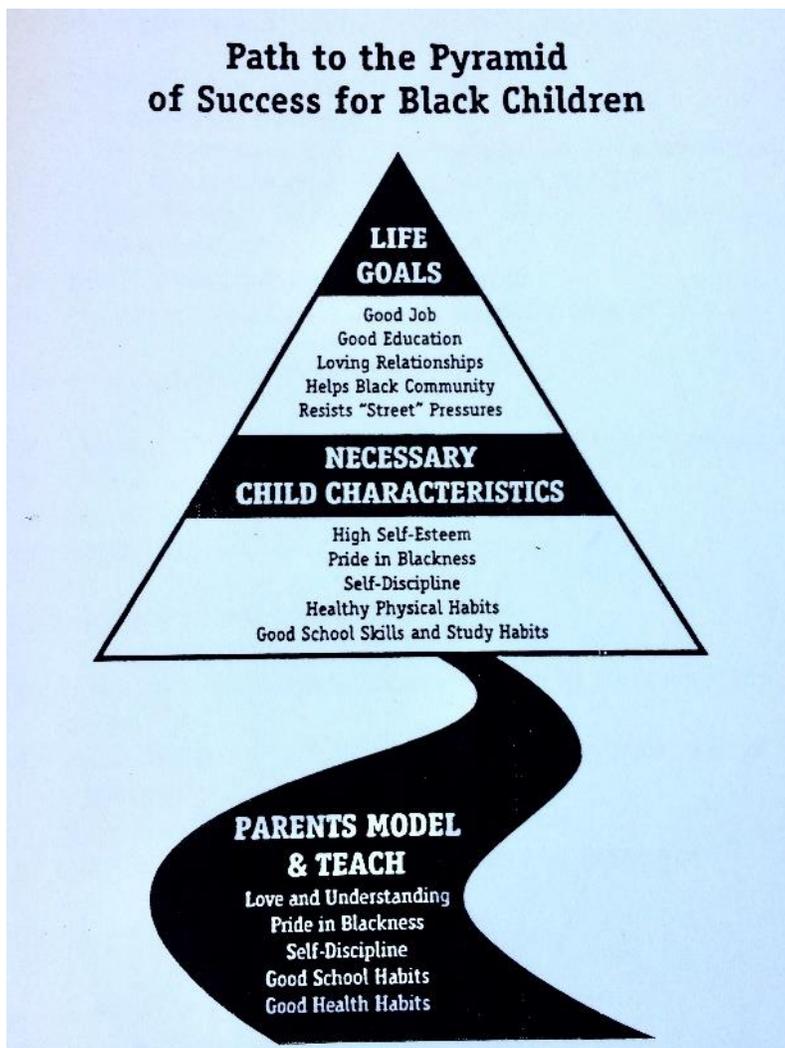
4. **Special Program Topics**

- A. Single Parenting
- B. Preventing Drug Abuse
- C. Child Abuse

Program outcome research has shown many positive benefits to the parents, children and families who have had an opportunity to experience classes in the program (Myers, Alvy et al, 1992). In some instances, the influence was transformational. Many parents stopped using physical punishment and focused instead on frequently using the effective praising method that is taught in the program to gain their children's cooperation and respect.

Their children have become more manageable and loving. They are achieving better in school.

All these happy and encouraging developments are now available on one website, CICC's new African American Parenting and Parent Education website, www.africanamericanparenting.org.

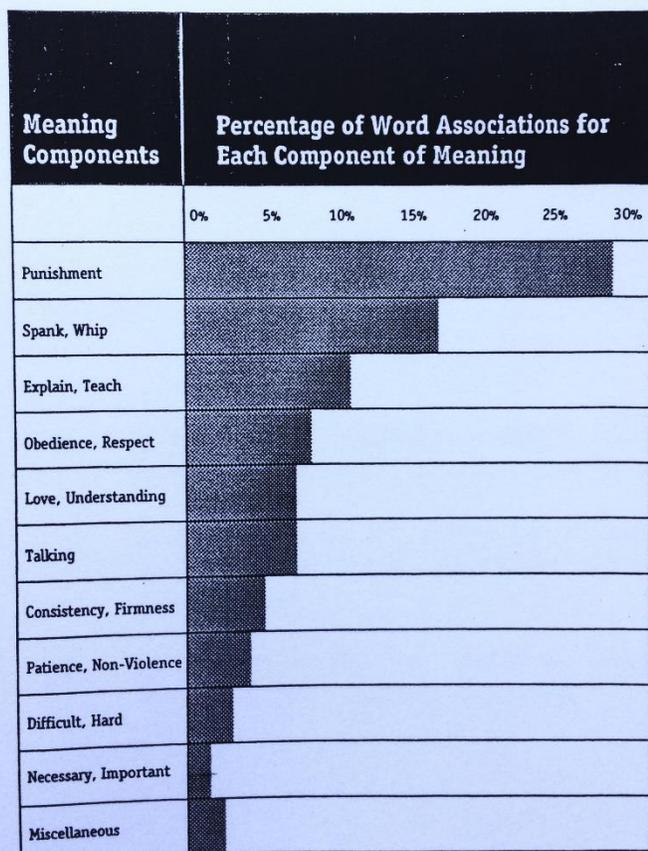


Two features of the program deserve highlighting in this essay.

The first is the Pyramid of Success for Black Children that is the culturally-specific parenting strategy that is taught in the first-class session. Using a call and response teaching approach that is heard in many black churches, the instructor elicits the life goals that the parents have for their children. Then the instructor conveys the characteristics that children need to develop to have the best chance of achieving the life goals. And then the instructor indicates what parents can model and teach to promote these important child characteristics.

When parents are doing this, they are said to be on the Path to the Pyramid of Success for Black Children. They are told that the entire class is designed to help them stay on The Path to the Pyramid of Success with their children.

The Meaning of Disciplining Children for Black Parents



The second feature that we highlight is probably the most powerful and controversial feature of this 4-decade old parenting program: the culturally-specific strategy that distinguishes between Traditional Black Discipline vs. Modern Black Self-Discipline.

This strategy is taught in the fourth session after the effective praising skill was taught and practiced in a prior session. In teaching this strategy, the parents are introduced to a task and results from some of the research that CICC conducted when it was developing the program.

The task is to elicit the words, images, ideas and short phrases that are associated with the concept of “disciplining children.” The instructor has the parents in the class provide their associations.

Then the instructor informs the parents that in the study that CICC did with 100 African Americans parents the results showed that most of their associations had to do with punishment, spanking and whipping.

The instructor explains these facts by drawing on the thinking of the African American parenting authorities that were writing at the time the program was created. These included the ideas of Clara McLaughlin of Howard University from her 1976 publication, **Black Parent’s Handbook**, the guidance of Dr. Phyllis Harrison-Ross of the New York Medical Center and Barbara Wyden in their book entitled **The Black Child: A Parent’s Guide** (1973), and the combined insights of Drs. James Comer of Harvard and Alvin Poussaint of Yale in their 1975 book **Black Child Care**. Their thinking was described in the following ways in the program.

The outlook that equates disciplining with harsh physical punishment was not shared by the African ancestors. The ancestors often viewed children as extensions of themselves, in that the parents would live on after their death, through the children. In some African countries there were clear values against ever hitting children that were expressed in proverbs like, “A shepherd does not strike his sheep.”

The traditional disciplining outlook was created as a protective outlook in response to the slavery experience. The slaves were beaten and killed through the middle passage journey and treated similarly by the slave masters who bought them. To bring the parents into that era, the program draws attention to the television classic, **Roots**, and the scene where the newly arrived slave, Kunta Kenta, is brutally beaten before the other slaves for refusing to use his slave name.

Then class parents are asked to reflect on these events and feel how they would respond in such a situation. At that point, most parents realize they would do everything possible to avoid their children having to face such cruelty. Many parents cry because they realize they too have been using similar methods in disciplining their children.

Thus, the program speaks to the origins of the traditional approach, which gets expressed in the idea that “I must protect my children from white harm, even if it means that I must beat the black off of him.” The other side of this idea is “I’d rather do that because I love him and don’t want him to be beaten or killed by the master.”

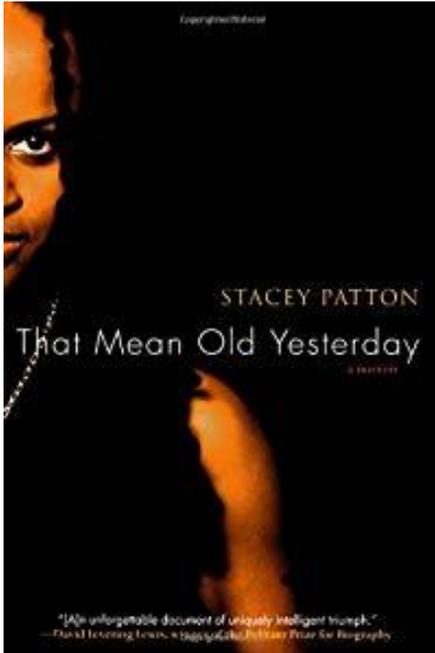
The authorities relate that the Jim Crow laws and poor educational and economic conditions that followed emancipation made it hard to learn other approaches. But now after the civil rights movement, where there are more opportunities for advancement, it is time for another approach.

The program calls the new approach Modern Black Self-Discipline. That is the approach that is taught throughout the program.

None of the authorities quoted in the program personalized their writings with detailed accounts of how their parents may have used physical punishment with them.

Dr. Stacey Patton's Experiences and Wisdom

African American journalist, Stacey Patton, Ph.D., brought many of these ideas to greater public and professional attention as she began publishing personal accounts of how she was beaten as a child. In addition, she wrote her dissertation about how slave owners wrote manuals with explicit instructions about how to beat slaves.



Her first major publication was her powerful 2007 book, **That Mean Old Yesterday**, which was published by Washington Square Press. In it, she painfully reported on how her middle class adoptive African American mother, Myrtle, treated her. For example, Dr. Patton wrote: *“No matter how much I tried to understand Myrtle’s justifications for all my whippings, with each slap, punch, switching, beating, and extension cord flogging, there was no way that any of it would ever make sense to me. I didn’t know then that this cultural sickness of violence against black children had stemmed from America’s plantations. I simply thought it was a black thing and that alone made me wish I was a little white girl”* (Pg. 54).

Spare the Kids

WHY WHUPPING CHILDREN
WON'T SAVE BLACK AMERICA



Dr. Patton has since published a new volume that brings her ideas up to date, **Spare the Kids: Why Whupping Children Won't Save Black America** (Patton, 2017b).

Prior to its publication, Dr. Patton wrote an excellent feature article that was based on her new book (Patton, 2017a). The article was called Stop Beating Black Children. It appeared in the March 10, 2017 edition of the New York Times. Here is the link to the entire article: <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/03/10/opinion/sunday/stop-beating-black-children.html> .

She concludes that excellent article by saying: *“Too many black leaders continue to support hitting children. A few years ago, our first black president joked nostalgically at the 100th anniversary of the N.A.A.C.P. about the days when the community was empowered to publicly whup misbehaving children. Black clergy preach a ‘spare the rod, spoil the child’ gospel. Black comedians make fun of white parents who do timeouts. And the latest trend is parents uploading videos to social media of them screaming at, shaming and hitting their kids, for millions of people to view and ‘like.’*

“The truth is that white supremacy has done a masterful job of getting black people to continue its trauma work and call it ‘tough love.’ That is how, in some 19 states, mostly in the South, you can get so many black parents to sign opt-in forms giving public schoolteachers permission to paddle their kids with wooden boards, even though black students are five times more likely to be hit than white students for committing the same offenses.

“Black children are also more at risk of being assaulted, seriously injured or killed by a parent than by a police officer, a neighborhood watchman or an irritated racist who hates rap music. We have to stop hurting our children to protect them. It is not working. And worse, it erodes our children’s humanity and co-signs the slave master’s logic that you have to hit a black body to make it comply.

“We need to stop teaching children that obedience is their greatest virtue. Especially as we brace for the possibility of more systemic racial devastation, we need young people who push boundaries and become the kinds of adults who will not let themselves be victimized.

“The violence that black children experience from trigger-happy cops, in the streets of cities like Baltimore and Chicago, in schools and at home is all interconnected. It is all strange and bitter fruit from the same tree. I am asking that black parents stop assisting in the devaluation of our children.

“Instead, we must make black childhood the antidote to centuries of racism.”

It is with humility and pride that CICC and its founder and executive director, Dr. Kerby T. Alvy, reminds us that CICC’s Effective Black Parenting Program is still very much available ---- to serve as a vehicle for reaching the noble societal goal which Dr. Patton so cogently, passionately and eloquently urges us to achieve.

References

The Parent Handbook and Instructor Manual, and other materials about the Effective Black Parenting Program, are available through the following page on CICC’s regular website, <http://www.mcssl.com/store/ciccparenting/the-effective-black-parenting-program>

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