

**1997 Position Paper Prepared by Dr. Kerby T. Alvy:  
Family Values, Effective Parenting, and a  
Presidential Council on Effective Parenting**

The issue of family values has taken center stage in debates about what is wrong with American society. Problems such as crime, violence, drug abuse, divorce, teen pregnancy and welfare dependence are all being discussed as consequences of a diminished respect for family values. A broad consensus has emerged from one end of the political spectrum to the other, that family values must be upheld and supported if we are to solve these seemingly intractable problems.

While a consensus exists that this needs to be done, no one has come up with a vehicle for how it can be done. However, such a vehicle does exist. The key is: effective parenting. Parenting that instills in children the values that are needed for them to become responsible, healthy and productive adults.

Everyone needs to become aware of this solution. An action-oriented Presidential Council on Effective Parenting could lead the way. A Presidential Council on this critical issue would find an extremely receptive audience because an Effective Parenting Movement has already taken root to improve the overall quality of parenting in America.

**The Effective Parenting Movement**

Literally thousands of individuals and institutions from all regions of the country, from all cultural and religious groups, and from all walks of life are already involved. Through their commitment to and delivery of parenting enhancement services, they have begun to bring the persons who are entrusted with the awesome responsibility of raising the next generation the training, education and emotional support that they need and deserve.

The leaders of the Effective Parenting Movement include such institutions as the schools and the instructors who teach parenting classes through the schools. Schools in our country have traditionally viewed parent training as a form of adult education. Currently, parent training is also being viewed as an important vehicle for involving parenting in their children's education and for preventing school dropout and failure. Schools are also delivering parenting training services to help reduce child abuse, drug abuse and gangs.

The other societal institutions that are mandated to address these horrendous problems, child welfare, health, mental health and law enforcement institutions, are also delivering and/or supporting parent training. In addition, progressive government employers and private corporations, who recognize that working parents need help in balancing job and parenting responsibilities, have begun offering and/or supporting parent training. Universities, colleges, extension programs, family resource centers, Head Start agencies, child care centers, and military bases are also participants, as are churches, temples and mosques and various civic and cultural groups who deliver and support parent training as an excellent means to strengthen families and build group solidarity.

**These institutions and their instructional staffs teach parents the skills of effective contemporary parenting: nurturing, communication, disciplining and non-violent conflict resolution skills. In so doing, they provide parents with the tools to instill in their children the important values of**

**mutual respect, empathy, compassion, cooperation, hard work, self-discipline and non-violence. They are doers when it comes to family values, not just talkers.**

The leading participants in the Effective Parenting Movement include a variety of non-profit national organizations with tremendous outreach through local chapters, member agencies, and networks of parenting instructors. Included are groups like the National Committee to Prevent Child Abuse, the Center for the Improvement of Child Caring, the Family Resource Coalition, the National Council on Family Relations, the National Coalition for Parent Involvement in Education, the National PTA, the National Parents' Day Coalition, the Child Welfare League of America, and the National Urban League. Proprietary groups like Active Parenting, Family Development Resources, Effectiveness Training International and American Guidance Services are also major participants. Vast professional organizations like the American Psychological Association are also involved, as are numerous federal, state and local government agencies, as well as faith-based community groups like the American Baptist Church.

Recent efforts to bring these parenting instructors from these groups together have shown special promise, and have been acknowledge by the President and Mrs. Clinton. For example, the President and Mrs. Clinton were very laudatory and supportive of the efforts of the National Parenting Instructors Association (a project of the Center for the Improvement of Child Caring). As the front page story in the enclosed Parenting Instructor publication reflects, both the President and Mrs. Clinton shared their appreciations of the value of parenting education before a summer 1996 conference.

**The President indicated that the work of those in the Effective Parenting Movement and in the parenting education field “is a vital investment in America’s future and an inspiration to all who seek to improve our world.” Mrs. Clinton concluded that such work “will pay huge dividends for our children, the health of our families and communities, as well as the future of our nation.”**

The logical next step is to have the issue of effective parenting and the importance of parenting education become a central part of the public dialogue on how best to improve America as we move into the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

A dialogue at the national level would alert millions of parents to the pivotal role that they play in creating a stronger and safer America, and would orient them to take advantage of parenting education programs and opportunities that currently exist in their communities and through the mass media, including through the Internet. Such a dialogue would also lead to more communities having a wider range of parenting programs available, as the general public would become more knowledgeable about the full spectrum of modern parenting education programs that our country has developed.

An excellent vehicle for the President to employ in initiating this important national dialogue would be an action-oriented Presidential Council on Effective Parenting.

### **Presidential Council on Effective Parenting**

A results-oriented Presidential Council would be the most immediate and visible symbol of a national commitment to effective parenting. It would also clarify the need for all parents to receive the best possible education, training and support to enable them to instill the cherished values in America’s children.

The Council's overriding goal would be to set in motion and support the forces that will lead to every community in the United States becoming knowledgeable about effective parenting and to every parent having the opportunity to receive the types of parental enhancement programs, services and information that are appropriate for her/his specific parenting situation. Decades of research confirm that when parents receive the latest skill-building programs and services, their families are strengthened and the lives of their children are significantly improved.

The Council would draw upon the expertise and consist of luminaries in the parenting and parental instruction fields; researchers and conceptualizers; ethnic and religious community leaders; political leaders with a strong commitment to effective parenting; and the government agencies associated with effective parenting. The Council would also consist of business, corporate and entertainment giants; major philanthropic foundations and personalities; non-profits; coalition leaders; law enforcement and substance abuse prevention authorities.

The Council would accomplish its goals by creating several task forces with specific action-oriented outcomes:

**A Task Force on Parenting Enhancement Programs and Services** would focus on identifying and making available the extraordinary array of effective parenting programs that now exist in our country, including programs for parents of different aged children, programs for parents of different cultural backgrounds, programs for parents who have children with special needs, and programs for parents that are at the highest risk for social, health and legal problems. This task force would develop its information base from all the federal government agencies that are currently supporting parenting enhancement programs and/or including them in manuals for use by local institutions. Its goal would be to create as comprehensive a database as possible about effective parenting programs.

A second **Task Force on Parenting Program Implementation** would be responsible for expediting the education of the general public about the existence and availability of these invaluable resources for enhancing parenting. This task force would also be charged with accelerating the education of leaders of all relevant societal institutions (schools, business, religious, civic and cultural groups, community agencies, etc.) in how they can bring the full array of high quality programs and services to the families they serve. The general public is currently not aware of this rich spectrum of parenting programs and only five percent have ever taken a multi-session parenting skill-building program. In addition, even the most progressive societal institutions are not now aware of the range and variety of excellent programs that now exist.

This task force would determine the best ways of getting this information out, such as through national, state and/or local telephone information and referral services (Parenting Information Services), through the information superhighway, through national and local television and radio programs and other creative means. It would also bring the public's attention to various community-wide effective parenting projects that could serve as models. In addition, it would also show how existing public and private funding sources could be used to facilitate the availability of these programs to all interested parents in every community, and the task force would also orient parents to budget annually to support their own education for parenthood.

A third **Task Force on Standards for Parenting Instructors** would focus on how parenting instructors are being trained and supported with the goal of having well-trained instructors in all communities so that every community will be able to provide the full spectrum of effective parenting programs. The promotion of national, state or local training academies may be the emphasis of this

important task force. The task force would also show how existing public and private sector funding sources can be utilized to support training academies and programs. In addition, it would orient all of the professional groups whose members historically become parenting instructors (educators, counselors, social workers, psychologists, etc.) how they can include training in parenting instruction as part of their regular degree programs at colleges, universities and professional schools.

The charge of a fourth **Task Force on Research and Evaluation** would be to make sure that the information that is shared on what constitutes effective parenting in our modern, multi-cultural, technological society is informed by what is known scientifically about effective parenting. Numerous federal government and private sector research institutes, hospitals and university-based research projects have produced a mountain of research on those patterns of parenting that predispose children to healthy and productive lives and on the conditions that promote effective parenting. This task force would summarize and bring attention to this important body of knowledge, which would be used for public education purposes. The task force would also be charged with showing how the various federal government research institutes can coordinate their efforts so that a clear national research strategy on effective parenting can be established.

The Research and Evaluation Task Force would also be responsible for summarizing the research on the various effects and effectiveness of parenting enhancement programs and services. In addition, it would show how evaluation methods and procedures can be incorporated into the regular delivery of these programs and services, so that program modifications and improvements can be made.

Taken as a whole, the action-oriented work of these task forces would provide the foundation for the best national system for promoting and realizing effective parenting. In so doing, the Council would serve to accelerate cultural transformations in preparing our country's parents for the awesome responsibility of raising the next generation and in restoring critically important family values. Its work would position the United States as the world's foremost parent and family-friendly country.