Positive Parenting Situational Assessment
Executive Summary

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This is a very brief summary of an 82 page document. If having more details would help in your effort towards community improvements, please contact the Huron County Health Unit at hchu@huroncounty.ca.

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Background
In order to make evidence-informed decisions for programming and resources at the Huron County Health Unit, the Health Unit conducted a situational assessment of positive parenting programming. Positive parenting was examined through various sources of evidence, including:

- Community health issues, local context
- Research
- Community and political preferences and actions
- Public Health Resources

The situational assessment summarized key findings and gaps for each area of evidence and made prioritized recommendations. Information gathered reflects a snapshot in time. Therefore it is acknowledged that as time changes, it is likely the sources of evidence do as well.

The specific recommendations from the report will remain as internal Health Unit information. However, this summary will help you, as a community partner, to decide whether the information in the report could help you in your work. Reports from the information compiled in the situational assessment can be tailored and released upon request on a case-by-case basis.

Situational Assessment Process
The positive parenting lead at the Health Unit took the main role in completing the situational assessment, along with support from other Health Unit staff.

The process began with gathering literature around parent engagement and the benefits of positive parenting programs. The Health Unit administered three surveys to gather local context:

- Parents: learn about the needs of parents and caregivers who have children 0-17 years of age.
- Community agencies: gather feedback on local programming for parents and caregivers who have children 0-17 years of age.
- High school youth: learn what youth at a local high school think parents should know more about when it comes to parenting.

The findings from the surveys, literature and other sources of evidence were then summarized into a full report. The report expanded on the following areas:

- Mental health and parenting
- Substance misuse and parenting
- Parental engagement
- Barriers parents have in accessing service
Report Limitations

Data for this report was obtained from a variety of sources. This section describes some of the problems that affect the quality of the data used in the report.

- Canadian Community Health Survey (CHSS) data has the ability to identify which Huron County adults are parents, however, the sample size is too small for meaningful analysis. Huron County parents did not differ significantly from other Huron County adults. Knowing that parents and adults of Huron County do not differ, suggests that the parental information can be directed at the adults of Huron County.
- Feedback from community partners. The Health Unit sent out an online survey to 56 community partners who work with parents and 22 completed responses were received. Information gathered showed that there are gaps in parenting programs for parents with children 7-17 years of age, although as there were only six responses from agencies who said that they have programs for children up to 17 years of age.
- The parenting survey was a voluntary, self-report gathering information about the needs of parents of Huron County. The parent/caregiver had to be at one of the community events or online.
- In the survey of high school students, only one high school was surveyed. The survey was check marks only, students were given the survey by a co-op student, and completed the survey in only the home room class.
- For health unit programming, many of the programs listed sit under different Ontario Public Health Standards and so are dependent on individual program demands, funding, evidence, and community need.
What is positive parenting?

Positive parenting is considered one of the strongest modifiable risk factors for health and well-being of children and youth. Positive parenting strategies are an effective way to promote optimal health, well-being and provide protective factors for a lifetime.

The Healthy Growth and Development Guideline, 2018, summarizes positive parenting as:

“Positive parenting promotes healthy attachment with the parent and child, as well as child management strategies to promote positive behaviours in children. Positive and consistent parenting has been associated with successful child development and fewer behaviour problems. Positive parenting can improve a child’s development trajectory despite other risks, whereas inconsistent parenting and poor parenting have negative effects. Children subject to harsh, inconsistent discipline practices are more likely to develop behaviour problems. Interventions to promote positive parenting may not only improve child behaviour but general child health outcomes.”

Positive parenting and healthy attachment is when:

- A parent is warm and nurturing, showing unconditional love
- Parent/caregiver listens for and responds to each child’s needs
- One has empathy with and respect for each child
- Parents/caregivers understands each child’s temperament and works with it
- Parents learn to stand back and learn about themselves as parents

Positive parenting promotes positive child behaviours by:

- Building on the strengths of each child
- Being flexible with each child
- Setting and communicating clear limits and expectations
- Constructing consequences that are natural and reasonable, but not punitive, to deal with irresponsible behaviour
- Using active listening to understand children’s thoughts
- Offering choices and encouraging problem solving and decision-making

Positive parenting uses positive and consistent parenting and

- Sets reasonable boundaries for development age
- Is consistent and predictable
- Establishes family rules and consequences as a family
- Is actively involved with each child
- Provides a physically and emotionally safe environment for each child
- Models appropriate behaviour
Positive parenting is an understanding of the importance of early child development and:

- Understands physical, social/emotional, and language cognitive domains of development
- Encourages, supports and accesses activities that enable the child to master key developmental tasks
- Exposes children to age-appropriate challenges to encourage development as well as experiences that allow the child to explore on their own and learn from interaction with their environment

What is happening locally to support positive parenting?

Locally there are several community agencies that support parents and caregivers. Parenting programs are either targeted or universal. The majority of programs are offered to parents/caregivers with children 0-6 years of age. There is a gap of universal programs for parents/caregivers with children 6-17.

Huron County parents of children and youth aged 0-17 were surveyed to learn about the needs of parents and caregivers. The purpose of the survey was to provide a picture of the current local context of parenting, with the goal of improving programs to better meet the parenting needs of the community. The positive parenting survey was completed by 645 parents in the fall of 2016. The majority of participants were mothers, followed by fathers and other caregivers (stepparents or legal guardians).

The most common parenting issues identified were dealing with difficult behaviours and disciplining children, and time management. Parenting topics of most interest were the safe and appropriate use of technology, coping with behaviours, and communicating with their child.

The majority of parents currently receive parenting information from internet/online resources, and social networks/circles. When parents were asked about their preferred method of receiving parenting information, they indicated the internet, social media, and print newsletters. Parents were also asked whom they would like to receive parenting information from and they indicated family/friends, health care provider and other parents. Community organizations that parents want to get their information from are schools/child care centres, Ontario Early Years, and the local Health Unit.

Parents expressed that barriers to attending programs were a lack of awareness of programs and timing of programs. Surveyed parents are looking for parenting programs in the evenings or weekends.

Parents have provided information about what topics/issues interest them, what method they would like to receive information through, and from whom they would like to receive parenting information from. The goal moving forward is to incorporate this information, collaborate with service providers, and support parents to promote optimal health and well-being for children and youth.

A full report can be found on the Huron County Health Unit’s website under the “Health Status Reports” section.
How do we enhance positive parenting in Huron County?

During the process of the situational assessment it was confirmed that positive parenting is critical to the physical and mental health of children and youth. Offering parenting support, information and programs will help parents with the variety of issues and challenges they face raising children and youth. Parenting is not formally taught; it is learned, based on how an individual was raised. During the situational assessment gaps were noted for parents with children over 6 years of age. The Health Unit is committed to enhancing positive parenting by providing information through different mediums, e.g. social media, e-newsletter. Various literature states that there is benefit in offering parenting programs that address the needs of the parents in the community, along with the importance of continued needs assessment of which issues parents are concerned with.

The Health Unit is committed to supporting positive parenting in Huron County. The Health Unit offers support to all parents and caregivers of children 0-17, looking for new and innovative ways parents can access reliable information to support their growing children.

- The Health Unit continues to work with community partners to offer information, support and guidance to parents and caregivers.
- The Health Unit Parenting in Huron Facebook page offers ongoing parenting information and the opportunity for parents and caregivers to engage with a public health nurse.
- The Health Unit offers a regular e-newsletter (Helpful Information for Parents) from Kindergarten to grade 12.
- The Health Unit offers an electronic development e-newsletter from Newborn to 3.5 years of age, delivered to the parent’s inbox when their child reaches specific developmental milestones.
References

The following are the references used in the original report.


22Nobody's Perfect Summary of Evaluations and Reports

23Strengthening families for parents and youth 12-16: A Community Initiative to adapt an evidence-based model for implementation with families of at-risk youth report. [PDF] (2011)

24Bounce back and thrive! Summary-5 year evaluation results [PDF] (2010-2016)


26Implementing Multi-Sectoral Healthy Child Development Initiatives: Lessons Learned From Community-Based Interventions. [PDF] (March 2017)

27Child Health Guidance Document [PDF]. Standards, Programs and Community Development Branch, Ontario Ministry of Health Promotion.

28Children Count Assessing Child and Youth Surveillance Gaps For Ontario Public Health Units. [PDF]