

White House Briefing

Presentation on

The National Effective Parenting Initiative (NEPI)

And a

**Proposed Government-Supported Effective Parenting
Initiative**

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PART ONE: NEPI

1. The Purpose of NEPI

The National Effective Parenting Initiative is about every child in America being raised effectively and humanely by parents who receive the best possible parenting education.

Children who are raised effectively and humanely by caring and skillful parents are the most likely to reach their full potential as human beings and to become healthy, peaceful and productive citizens.

The most direct and sensible way of helping all parents to be effective and humane in raising their children is to provide them with high quality parenting education.

By helping every parent to be the best parent possible, we help every child to become the best person and citizen he or she can be.

NEPI also seeks to prevent the costly, often tragic problems that are either caused by or made worse by ineffective and uninformed parenting. These problems include child abuse and neglect, mental health and learning problems, physical health problems such as obesity, school failure and drop out, juvenile delinquency, drug abuse, gangs, crime and violence.

By helping to prevent these parenting-related problems, the Initiative will also make our communities safer and healthier places to live.

In short, the National Effective Parenting Initiative promotes effective parenting and parenting education as essential for:

- helping every American child become the best person he or she can be, and
- helping America solve some of its most pressing domestic problems.

2. The History of NEPI

1994

This comprehensive conceptualization – that effective parenting and parenting education are central to promoting healthy human development and preventing numerous domestic problems – may have had its first systematic articulation in a 1994 book, [*Parent Training Today: A Social Necessity.*](#)

The book summarized the research that demonstrates the impact of both effective and ineffective parenting on human development, and the many domestic problems that can be ameliorated by more parents becoming effective and humane in raising children.

The book also noted that numerous disciplines and organizations, including federal government organizations, were already involved in promoting parenting education as an important treatment and prevention approach. This emphasis on parenting education within such fields as health, mental health, juvenile justice, substance abuse and education was referred to as the Effective Parenting Movement.

For example, in the government arena, many health, mental health, substance abuse, juvenile justice and educational

departments and agencies have had their own parenting and parenting education projects, each aimed at preventing or treating problems in their areas of interest, though none have been coordinated with each other in any systematic manner. In corporate America, some businesses have been providing employees with parenting resources and lunch and learn seminars, and even incorporating parenting education into wellness and employee assistance programs.

Many church groups have been providing parenting education in the form of Mommie and Me and Daddie and Me classes, as well as retreats and other forms of parenting education. Schools have been providing some type of parenting education as part of overall adult education offering for years, and more recently they have been providing parenting education programs as part of drug free school, drop out prevention, family literacy, and child abuse prevention efforts. These projects and programs also are infrequently coordinated.

In terms of what research indicates may be the most powerful form of education for parents, the modern parenting and family skill-building programs that originated in the 1960s with Dr. Thomas Gordon's Parent Effectiveness Training and which now includes numerous versions that are designed for different populations of parents and versions that provide skill training and support for all family members – these highly valued components of the Effective Parenting Movement are either not available or unevenly available in different cities and communities or not available at all. These are the programs that most clearly teach parents the skills that are needed to instill in children such cherished values as mutual respect, responsibility, honesty, hard work, empathy, self-discipline, compassion, and nonviolence.

The book also stressed that the movement was basically invisible to the public and unacknowledged as movement per se. The main thing that it lacked in order to reap its full harvest, and make the effective and humane rearing of every child in America a reality, was recognizable and powerful leadership.

1995

These ideas and this book were shared with President Clinton and The First Lady in the Oval Office in 1995 during the signing into law of the legislation that created National Parents' Day, a holiday to celebrate the importance and role of parents in promoting the healthy development of America's children.

It was my privilege to be invited to that event. I was there because the parenting and parenting education organization that I founded in 1974, the nonprofit Center for the Improvement of Child Caring (CICC), was one of the eight national organizations that were being honored as part of the celebration of the first National Parents' Day.

Having direct access to the White House through being part of that historic occasion led the staff of CICC and myself to the idea of asking the President to become the leader of the effective parenting movement. The question was, what form might such leadership take? The idea of a Presidential Commission on Effective Parenting emerged.

We started sharing this idea with various individuals in the White House, including members of the Domestic Policy Council and the First Lady's staff. We were asked to put together a proposal for such a commission.

After the proposal was developed, the next step was to have a White House Briefing with the leaders of those federal government departments and agencies that had parenting programs and projects. The briefing, which I was to lead, was to be a prelude to announcing and supporting the commission.

In the end, despite its enthusiasm for the idea, the attention of the White House was diverted to other matters and we were not able to pursue the proposal, thereby losing an opportunity to give the Effective Parenting Movement the leadership it needs.

2005

When we saw that the current administration was promoting educational efforts – such as the Healthy Marriage Initiative - - that would create healthier relational contexts for raising children, we became invigorated again about bringing a comprehensive parenting education concept to the White House.

Some of the African American organizations that utilize CICC's Effective Black Parenting Program suggested that it might be productive to visit with the White House Liaison person for the African American community and put us immediately into contact with that person.

Why were representatives of the African American community so willing and eager to share access to the White House?

Some of their motivation is captured in the following quotes from parents who have completed the Effective Black Parenting Program:

From Compton, California:

“My world of parenting has been opened to a new horizon. I’m a better mother and a better friend to my children.”

From Atlanta, Georgia:

“One of my sons is in prison for drug selling. Now I know from this class that if I had let him speak more than I used to, if I didn’t always say, ‘Shut your mouth,’ I don’t think he would be in the position he is now.”

From Tulsa, Oklahoma:

“After taking this course, I would like to see more Blacks become involved, including my family members. My feelings are exactly like coming to know God. Once you have seen the light, you want everyone to see the same light so we as a race will not perish.”

When I visited with their liaison person in the Executive Office Building early in 2005, I brought along the detailed proposal that by that time had been developed for [An Effective Parenting Initiative](#) that could be embraced by the White House and the federal government.

That *Initiative* included the creation of a Department of Effective Parenting or a White House Office of Effective Parenting, with a corresponding National Council on Effective Parenting and a clearinghouse, research institute and parenting instructor training center.

The liaison to the African American community thought that a good place to start with this idea was to introduce it to the First Lady's Office. The person in Mrs. Bush's office we spoke with was impressed with the concept, though a little daunted by its scope and detail.

That person indicated the proposed *Initiative* would have to be reviewed and vetted by administration parenting experts. So that *Initiative* was sent to the Department of Health and Human Services and its Administration for Children, Youth and Families.

The reception was excellent and it was decided to formally bring the *Initiative* to the attention of the White House through a White House Briefing of the Domestic Policy Council. Such a briefing was planned for December 2005 when I was to be in Washington for a speech I was giving at a national convention.

However, that briefing had to be cancelled because the Policy Council had more pressing matters to attend to when I was in Washington.

Instead, I visited with the staffs of several congressional offices, Democrats and Republicans, to bring their attention to this proposal for a government-supported *Effective Parenting Initiative*. They, too, thought this was a fine and timely idea.

2006

About midway through 2006, CICC and I decided to incorporate the idea and proposal for a federal government-supported initiative into a larger, multi-faceted grassroots effort to make effective parenting and parenting education

societal priorities. That effort is NEPI, the National Effective Parenting Initiative.

While CICC and I have taken the lead in creating and maintaining NEPI, we are now only one segment of a much larger and growing coalition of individuals and organizations working toward this important goal.

For example, after mentioning the creation of NEPI to the 40,000 subscribers to CICC's online Effective Parenting newsletter, numerous like-minded individuals and organizations wanted to help, much like the people who put us in contact with the Bush White House initially.

This interest has resulted in the development of the current NEPI Board of Advisors and several large and small organizations that have already become affiliates of NEPI. In addition, a NEPI website has been created, along with an Effective Parenting Petition that can be signed by people who also believe in the importance of effective parenting and parenting education. All of this development work has been accomplished during September, October and November of this year.

During that time, I contacted the individual in ACYF who had tried to arrange the cancelled White House Briefing. I asked him if it would be possible to reschedule the briefing, given the creation of NEPI and given that the government-supported initiative was still one of the goals.

He said he would see what could be done with his and ACYF's contacts in the White House. Within a week, he phoned back to say he had found receptive people and today's briefing began to take shape.

We would like to commend this individual, Mr. Harry Wilson, and the Administration for Children, Youth and Families, and thank them for their commitment to the children, youth and families of America by making sure that this long-awaited briefing finally came into existence.

We would also like to thank the White House officials for having this administration be the first to actually host such an event. We are hopeful that all of you will bring NEPI and the government *Initiative* to the attention of President Bush, and that all will work together to achieve the goal of every child in America being raised effectively and humanely.

Before turning to a description and discussion of the proposed *Government-Supported Initiative*, let me provide an update and description of NEPI and some of its plans.

4. NEPI Current Status and Plans

Let me briefly summarize NEPI's current activities and plans. NEPI will continue to:

- advocate for the federal government-supported initiative, as well as similar initiatives for state, county and city governments. It will also present and advocate for community-wide effective parenting projects, like [projects to bring parenting education into early childhood and child care settings](#).
- be a resource (through its website, for example) for individual parents to help them be the best modern day parents possible -- helping deal with a wide range of parenting matters such as internet safety, drug abuse, finding parenting classes in their communities, improving their relationships, finding excellent parenting

guides and the best parenting websites, as well as through having its affiliated parenting education organizations provide services and materials at reduced rates.

- help interested and qualified persons to become parenting educators, instructors, coaches and home visitors.

As it expands its work, NEPI plans to:

- grow its Advisory Board with more parenting experts, researchers and program developers, as well as create a new School Advisory Board made up of superintendents and principals, and an Honorary Board composed of ex-presidents, members of congress, cultural icons and sport and media persons.
- greatly increase the number of affiliated organizations beyond the current list that already consists of several national and local parenting and parenting education groups, including such national groups as Active Parenting, the Center for the Improvement of Child Caring, and Strengthening Families. The plan is to have at least **“10 per state by 2008”** or at least 500 affiliated groups by that time.

These affiliated organizations have extraordinary outreach nationally and locally and are pivotal in mobilizing NEPI supporters.

For example, the Center for the Improvement of Child Caring has run local parenting education projects in Los Angeles County that have reached as many as 20,000 parents.

It has also already trained over 4000 parenting instructors from 44 states through its instructor training workshops. These instructors work for approximately 2500 local child welfare, mental health, drug abuse, youth and educational organizations.

Research on the uses that such instructors make of their training indicates that, on the average, each trains and influences approximately 1300 people within 18 months after completing their workshops.

If only 1% of the people each CICC instructor trains and influences (that would be 13 people per instructor, including parents whose reactions we heard earlier) that would be 52,000 supporters of effective parenting and parenting education from CICC-trained instructors alone.

Effective Parenting Petition

One of the actions that such supporters would be asked to take is to sign the online Effective Parenting Petition. In addition to signing the petition, they would also be able to express their views on these matters. In the few weeks that the petition has been available, over 500 supporters from 46 states have already signed.

The following comments are typical.

Supporter # 233 from New York indicated:

“Parents need the skills to parent effectively. Today's society is so toxic -- every child today is at risk. Parents absolutely need the benefit of recent research, knowledge and skills to offer their children the best defense against modern pressures of growing up in America.”

This supporter # 208 from Indiana added:

“Strong, informed and dedicated parents are the key to the positive future of this country.”

And another New York-based supporter, #163, also appreciates the broader meaning of NEPI:

“NEPI will focus attention on the need for everyone to consider and reflect on how we raise our nation’s children. It has the potential to broaden interest in the lives and opportunities for all children in the United States. A national level of commitment to all children is central to ensuring that as a society, we have a place in the 21st century.”

Now let me describe the proposal for the federal government’s role that NEPI is bringing before you.

PART TWO: PROPOSED FEDERAL GOVERNMENT-SUPPORTED EFFECTIVE PARENTING INITIATIVE

5. Purposes of the Government Initiative

The overarching goal of the federal government-supported Effective Parenting Initiative would be to bring cohesion, visibility and leadership to the effective parenting movement that already exists. Its four overlapping purposes would be to:

1. Acknowledge and celebrate the importance of effective parenting and parenting education,
2. Increase awareness and use of effective parenting programs and resources,
3. Increase the availability of the full spectrum of effective parenting programs and resources, and
4. Increase the effectiveness of current programs and resources, as well as to develop new programs and resources as needed.

These four goals would be accomplished by creating several new government entities and structures. Two such structures would be key:

1. A Department of Effective Parenting or a White House Office of Effective Parenting headed by a Director, who would report directly to the President.

2. A National Council on Effective Parenting would support the Department/Office.
3. The Clearinghouse, Training Center and Institute would Implement the programs with assistance from Task Forces from the National Council on Effective Parenting.

National Council on Effective Parenting

This prestigious Council would be composed of leaders from (1) all sectors of American society, the media, faith, education, labor, research, philanthropy, and business or corporate America. The Council would also include (2) the leaders of all of the government departments and agencies with parenting service delivery, training and research programs, and (3) the leadership of the major nongovernmental national parenting and parenting education organizations.

Each Council member from the major societal sectors and the government departments and agencies would be responsible for ensuring that effective parenting and parenting education are and continue to be priorities in their sectors, through such actions as appointing a Director or Coordinator of Effective Parenting and Parenting Education. These individuals would be vigilant in ensuring that, for example, government agencies and corporations would continue to provide parenting education opportunities and resources and do so in a coordinated fashion, as well as have family-friendly employment policies and employee benefits that include parenting education.

In addition, the Council members would form into Task Forces to relate and support the work of a National

Clearinghouse on Effective Parenting, a National Parenting Instructor Training Center and Research Institute, the National Effective Parenting Institute.

National Clearinghouse on Effective Parenting

The Clearinghouse would work closely with the Media Task Force of the National Council. Its functions would include information sharing with the American public and acknowledging effective parenting and parenting education activities and achievements. This Clearinghouse would be responsible for:

1. Sharing information on what constitutes effective parenting, with an emphasis on sharing results of research studies on effective parenting through distilling them into understandable and accessible communications, as well as doing the same with the latest research findings on child development.
2. Sharing information on parent effectiveness programs and what parents can expect to learn, as well as sharing information about all other types of parenting resources that are available and how to access them.
4. Organizing and implementing National Parents' Day Celebrations. The Clearinghouse would also be responsible for creating and distributing Presidential Certificates of Appreciation to every parent who successfully completes a parent effectiveness class, seminar or workshop.

National Parenting Instructor Training Center

This new federal government entity is needed because of the uneven availability and lack of availability of modern parenting skill-building programs in various cities nationwide. Preparing more instructors, educators, coaches and home visitors from all communities makes it possible for all communities to have equal access to the best parenting programs. This would be accomplished through:

1. Providing instructor training workshops in various parenting and family programs nationwide, and providing the graduates with ongoing technical assistance in generating, conducting and evaluating their programs and classes.
2. Providing workshops in generic, non-program specific parenting and family life education nationwide, and providing the graduates with ongoing technical assistance in generating, conducting and evaluating such interventions.
2. Working closely with universities and colleges to have them include training to be parenting and family life instructors, educators, coaches and home visitors as part of the degree programs in fields like psychology, social work and education.
4. Developing standards for certifying parenting and family life training personnel.

The Task Force from the National Council on Effective Parenting that would work closely with the Training Center would be composed of the (1) representatives from those federal departments and agencies who currently provide

various types of training, (2) representatives from the nongovernmental parenting organizations who also provide training in their programs and approaches, and (3) representatives from universities and colleges.

National Institute on Effective Parenting

This research and program evaluation institute would have responsibility for supporting and stimulating:

- Research on parent-child relations for the purpose of helping define effective parenting.
- Research on child development for the purpose of having accurate information to share with parents.
- Research on the effectiveness of parenting and family skill-building programs and resources to be able to share with parents to orient them what to expect from participating in such programs.
- Research to create new programs for parent populations, particularly for parent populations for which none currently exist.
- Cost effectiveness and cost offset studies, including longitudinal studies, to promote the wise utilization of funds.

Funding the Overall Initiative

A variety of creative strategies can be used to fund the Initiative and its various components, relying on the participation of all of the societal sectors that are

represented on the National Council on Effective Parenting. All of these sectors will be beneficiaries of this Initiative and all can help in fund it. Here are some strategies:

- Reallocations of existing federal funding, including training, research, foster care and clearinghouse monies.
- Utilization of private sector funds for various aspects, including foundation, corporate and United Way funding, as well as pro bono media services.
- Encouragement of the creation of new private sector funds to support various aspects of the Initiative, such as encouraging individual philanthropists to underwrite specific aspects themselves.
- Encouragement of parents to support their own education for parenthood, such as paying on a sliding scale for parenting and family skill-building programs and classes.
- Allocation of new tax dollars.

National Parents Day Proclamation

This Initiative is clearly in line with the sentiment expressed by President Bush in a recent proclamation on National Parents Day:

“Parents are role models for their children. With patience, sacrifice, and love, they teach their children life lessons and prepare them for the future.

“We honor parents for their dedication to providing our nation’s children with the love and support they need.”

Concluding Comments

By giving his strong support to the Effective Parenting Initiative, President Bush will be going beyond his stirring affirmation honoring parents and providing bold presidential leadership to make effective parenting a true national priority.

He will be helping to give parents the tools they need to help every child in America grow into a happy, healthy and productive citizen.

Finally, the president and administration that embraces and actualizes the Effective Parenting Initiative, and therefore provides leadership for the Effective Parenting Movement, will have as its legacy one of the greatest achievements of all time.

The entire NEPI coalition stands ready to help you achieve this golden legacy.

Thank you.

