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RAISING COOPERATIVE FAMILIES

BY JOAN HUNT *ReminderNews Editor*

Sometimes it seems as though America's families are under siege. Rising costs of commodities like housing and fuel often mandate a double income, which cuts down on family time as well as the energy parents have left at the end of the day with which to "parent." Women like Celia Camilleri of neighboring Windsor Locks has chosen to stay home with her daughter Alexandra, 3, and her 4-month-old son Gaytano, but the challenge for the Camilleri family, and others like them, is how to keep expenses down so mom can stay home.

"There are pluses and minuses to everything," said Celia, before the program called "Raising Cooperative Families" at Poquonock School last Monday night, "[but] I get to spend all this time with my kids."

The Camilleris and others had come to get tips on how to make time spent with their families quality time, rather than the battle for control that can occur when there is lack of cooperation between family members.

"Progress, not perfection, is our main goal here," said Life Coach Steve Porcaro. The father of two Poquonock School students and an older son at community college, Porcaro said he learned a lot of his techniques during his 10 years as a Boy Scout leader. "I tried them at home, and found that they worked," he said.

"When I was a youngster, my father was the disciplinarian," said Porcaro, "but we revolted in my house."

The first thing you have to ask yourself, according to Porcaro, is what you are doing to promote cooperation and if it is working. If it isn't, you need to change what you are doing.

Sounds easy, but like most things that net great results on a regular basis, it isn't.

For example, a gentleman from a twodad family said he ends up threatening or losing his temper when he asks to have a room cleaned up and nothing happens. "Why can't I just ask them and have them do it?" he asked.

Others admitted nagging or bribing their child to perform the desired task. John Gapko said that he and his wife, Cindy, sometimes take their young son's boots away until he cooperates with a chore because they are a favorite thing for him to wear.

Nagging, according to Porcaro, is unproductive because kids tune it out and because it makes the child – or even a spouse – feel that you have no faith in them and that they are incompetent without you. They recognize this as a way to get attention, although it is a negative way. Likewise, yelling, criticizing, blaming, threatening, moralizing and begging usually fail to garner the desired result.

What does work? "Look directly at kids when you talk to them," Porcaro suggested – preferably at their eye level. "Listen carefully to others and be sure you understand what they are saying." Other suggestions included giving choices, when possible, or making winwin agreements. "You do your room, I will do the dishes, and then we will play a game," he said, as an example.

It is important to follow through with consequences, if they are to be meaningful, Porcaro said. Other tips included limiting the words you use to avoid sounding like a lecture, being honest about your feelings, focusing on the behavior, rather than making discipline a personal issue, using humor, using the grandmother law of "after you have done your homework, you may..." and choosing your timing. "Solving problems is best done in emotionally neutral spaces and times," he said.

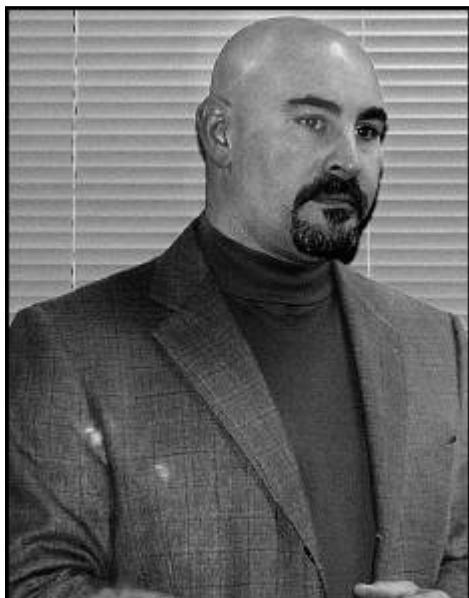
Several families reported success when they planned family chores, like doing the dishes, packing snacks for an outing or cleaning out the garage. Another member of the group shared that he had success when setting very clear expectations and being consistent.

Another issue that several families reported having trouble with was parental agreement on discipline. Porcaro agreed that this was a key element. "If we aren't on the same page, how can we keep them on the same page?"

The free program was presented by the Poquonock Family Resource Center. For questions, call Ann McAdams at 687-2080, ext. 131. To contact Life Coach Steve Porcaro, call 860-243-9757.



Families enjoyed pizza and fruit together, then kids went off to play during the “Raising Cooperative Children” program at Poquonock School.



Life Coach Steve Porcaro led the discussion. Photos by Joan Hunt.

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