

Classes can help make young parents better parents

After reading a baby T-shirt proclaiming “I don’t come with instructions,” Robin Newnan laughed, and then grabbed up several of them for the grandbabies she’s expecting in the next few months.

“My daughter can dress my granddaughter in this T-shirt on her first day of class at FOR-U,” she said. “I think it will be cute. And while she’s there, she can sign up for some more of the free life-enhancing courses they offer.”

It’s been 25 years since Newnan last had a baby, and there have been so many changes it’s hard to keep up with them all.

“Most of the old wives’ tales have been debunked,” Newnan said. “But there are still myths out there about safe baby care that are nothing more than that, just myths, and some of them are dangerous.

“Young parents need to go and talk with an informed person about the latest news on raising babies.”

Newnan said that when her sister gave birth in the 80s, she would place them on their stomachs while they slept. Now, she said, that practice is being discouraged through the “Back to Sleep” method, which recommends placing babies on their backs.

It can be very stressful trying to figure out the perfect way to raise a baby, without being overly worried that you’re doing wrong.

New moms and dads want to do everything perfect, and McAlester has an answer. First, calm down, take a deep breath and then kiss the top of your baby’s head.

Feel better?

Kissing babies can make a person feel happier. And that’s part of the lesson taught in the three-part class called Parenting Young Children. It will be held on the first three Tuesdays of November at the Pittsburg County Health Department, 1400 E. Collage Ave., across the street from the McAlester Regional Health Center.

Those classes are just a few of the classes being offered by the Family Outreach University, aka FOR-U. The University is a community service project of the Pittsburg County Local Service Coalition.

“This class separates the myths from the facts about safety issues for children,” Dr. Terry Shaw said, reiterating that babies don’t come with instructions and neither do parents.

It’s a learning process for everyone—one that can be extremely enjoyable for everyone involved.

Parenting Young Children starts out with newborns, goes through the toddler years, and finishes up by assessing the parent’s own parenting style and, if necessary, how it can be improved for the wellbeing of the child.

FOR-U also offers courses in Preserving the Family and Anger Management and the teen-parent sex workshop called Can We Talk.

Classes on domestic violence will be offered closer to Christmas. “That’s traditionally when domestic violence breaks out,” Shaw said. “Tensions can get really tight around that time.”

Domestic Violence 101, "Understanding the Syndrome," the course syllabus says that participants "will become more familiar with the mixed feelings of love and violence, and learn how guilt, blame and poor self-esteem contribute to the perpetuation of the problem."

The next class is about developing a personalized safety plan, while the third one is about the effects of domestic violence on children.

Participants "will learn to listen to their children, recognize signs of their emotional distress, and realize that staying with the violent offender does not actually protect them," according to the course syllabus.

While the courses are free, and advanced registration is not required, people who will be bringing children along need to let the staff know beforehand so they can plan supervised activities for them.

A Certification of Attendance will be provided at the end of the semester to all people who finish the courses they've signed up to take, without leaving class early.

For additional information, contact the Child Guidance Division of the Pittsburg County Health Department at 423-1267.

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