

# WCC, BTC classes give parents a place to start

ZOE FRALEY

It's an oft-lamented fact that children don't come with an instruction manual.

Sure, there are plenty of books and websites full of philosophies, tips and tricks for raising a child - too many, really - but sometimes you can't beat sitting down with other parents and people who know what they're doing.

That's where parenting classes can come in handy.

Whatcom Community College's parenting education coordinator Kristine Smith and parenting educator Darcie Donegan and Bellingham Technical College child and family studies program coordinator Linda Crawford answer some common questions about parenting classes.

## **Question: What are some of the options for parents looking for parenting classes?**

Answer: WCC offers parenting education classes through affiliated cooperative preschools: When you enroll your child at co-op preschool, you, the adult, are automatically enrolled in a parenting education class.

Adults help regularly in the classroom (the "lab" portion), have a special job to help run the preschool and attend monthly parenting education classes in their location.

WCC-affiliated cooperative preschools are in four locations in Whatcom County: Lynden, South Hill (across from Lowell Elementary), Silver Beach Elementary School and Sunnyland Elementary School. WCC partners with Bellingham Public Schools in several locations and programs.

Bellingham Technical College offers both once a week adult/child classes for parents and their infants through preschools, and adult-only discussion classes on specific topics related to parenting. The adult/child classes are held in Bellingham. The adult-only discussion classes are generally offered on the BTC campus but can be offered wherever there is an interested group.

The adult/child courses allow parents to build lasting relationships with other families while their child learns through play in a fun, safe, preschool-like environment. New parent-chosen topics each quarter guide class discussion about topics such as development, temperament, guiding behavior, and caring for yourself and your child.

## **Q: What can people learn in the parenting classes at WCC and BTC? What should they expect from the classes?**

A: Parenting educators at both BTC and WCC share research-based current information on a variety of subjects such as child development, discipline, nutrition, sleep, power struggles and other contemporary family issues. The classes are interactive so the families have a chance to develop a system of support and learn from each other, not just the instructors.

## **Q: Is there an age range for kids that these kinds of classes cover? Are they just for new parents?**

A: WCC serves families with children ages 2 to 6 years. BTC serves families with infants and children through the teen

years. The classes can be for anyone caring for young children: parents, grandparents, caregivers.

These students can be new to parenting or experienced. The amazing thing about parenting is that there is always something new to learn, and every child that you parent is different.

## **Q: Who do you think is best served by these classes?**

A: People who are open to learning about themselves and want to be better caregivers to their children get the most out of these classes.

## **Q: Why do you think it's important for parents to take classes like these?**

A: Parents and fulltime caregivers are their child's first teachers, and they shape the quality of a child's development. Parenting education can help by "strengthening families by providing relevant, effective education and support and encouraging an optimal environment for the healthy growth and development of parents/caregivers and children," according to the National Parenting Education Network.

Parenting classes build community and support systems for years to come, well into when children get into high school and beyond. They also start families' lifelong involvement with their children's education, which studies show benefits children in multiple ways.

It is important to take parenting classes like these because parenting can be a lonely endeavor, and all families benefit from connecting with others in the same stage of life. Parents also appreciate having a professional parenting educator to turn to for help and information.

## **Q: Anything that people are surprised by in the classes?**

A: Families are often surprised - and reassured - to find out that they are not the only ones struggling with a particular stage or issue. Parents are also sometimes amazed by how much new information and research is available now.

## **Q: Any tips you wish you'd gotten as a parent?**

A: Many of us now have teen or grown children, and there are many things we wish we had known earlier. The main thing is that the early years are exhausting but you don't need to be perfect - children basically need love and structure. And it is so true that "the days pass slowly, but the years pass quickly."

## **Q: Where can parents go for more information about these classes?**

A: For more information about WCC's cooperative preschools, go online to [whatcom.ctc.edu/degrees-and-programs/special-programs/parent-cooperative-preschool](http://whatcom.ctc.edu/degrees-and-programs/special-programs/parent-cooperative-preschool).

BTC's Baby n Me classes are 16 hours over eight weeks and cost \$93.99, including all class materials. Its Adult/Child classes are 25 hours over 10 weeks and cost \$161.34, including all materials. Adult Discussion classes (one-day workshops with online backup or a five- to seven-session series) range from \$62.66 to \$93.99, with class texts extra. Half scholarships are available for the classes. Parents can register for the classes at the Bellingham Technical College College Services Building or go online at [btc.ctc.edu](http://btc.ctc.edu) and click "Take a Class."