

Speak Softly and Make a Big Change

Kathleen says hers is a “yelling” family. With five kids from age three up, chaos can and does break out regularly, especially in public, like when they are coming home on the MBTA bus.

That’s why, since she enrolled in Families First’s 8-session *Parents As First Teachers* series, held in her neighborhood at South End Community Health Center (SEHC), Kathleen has been resolved to make a change. After one session, she went home and tried speaking to her kids in a low voice, as her Parenting Educator suggested. It was a game-changer. The kids sat quietly

and looked nervous—like they thought Kathleen had gone a little crazy. But for once she felt very much in control, and she was able to communicate with them effectively using her new strategy.

Kathleen admits her family climate is a work in progress, but she has become convinced that it is within her power to shift the dynamics for good.

Families First has developed a powerful new longer-term series, which we’re offering in partnership with strong local organizations, including SEHC, Associated Early Care & Education in the Jackson Square area of Jamaica Plain, and Urban Edge, which



PHOTO: MELORA BALSON

serves parents in Dorchester. Kathleen is just one of many participants who are finding new strategies and forging new, supportive relationships with other parents in their communities.

Funding by longtime partner P&G/ Gillette makes possible our education and support for parents of children in the critical 0-5 stage!



PHOTO: KARA DELAHUNT

Families First, Media Second

our workshop series bring parents the latest thinking on this difficult subject.

We have been able to bring two noted thinkers on kids and the media to recent donor events, where our friends—old and new—have been able to explore the topic deeply. In his talk at our Fathers’ Breakfast in November, Colin Stokes spoke about what popular movies tell our kids about gender. Stokes is a local nonprofit staffer, dad, former actor, and children’s media critic, known for his TEDxBeaconStreet talk “How Movies Teach Manhood” and his blog Zoom Out. He highlighted the fact that kids’ movies, especially, tend to have few female characters whose lives don’t

revolve around those of male characters. Many of the fathers and mothers present found his insights eye-opening.

Clinical psychologist Dr. Catherine Steiner-Adair has studied the effects of technology on families for her book, *The Big Disconnect*. At our February Roundtable event, murmurs of recognition could be heard as she told of her findings that parents’ use of smartphones can undermine parent-child relationships and that children’s texting can interfere with their development of interpersonal skills.

Our own Dr. O’Brien says we must take care not to saddle parents with

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The pervasive influence of media on kids is certainly one of the most important parenting issues of our time, so it’s not really a surprise that it keeps coming up—both as a topic for discussion at donor events and as a much-requested topic by the parents we serve. Our in-house expert, Dr. Maureen O’Brien, has been reviewing studies and books and making sure

Parents of the Roundtable

Our content-rich Roundtable event series has proven to be a great way to introduce new communities to Families First and strengthen ties with existing supporters!

Each Roundtable discussion has been held in a different community, and—thanks to great hosts and speakers!—each has been unique and engaging. In September, Libby Moore of Needham hosted a talk by psychologist Karen Weisgerber about *Instilling Gratitude* in young children. *Culture and Parenting* was the topic of Phyllis Sonnenschein's Cambridge Roundtable in October, where Board Member Dr. Nancy Hill shared her own fascinating research. Parents who attended *Helping Children Become Givers* in November at Jessica Shattuck's home in Brookline, learned to identify developmentally-appropriate volunteer opportunities for children. Most recently, Judith Sydney hosted a larger discussion on *Parenting in the Digital Age* with respected psychologist and author of *The Big Disconnect*, Catherine Steiner-Adair. With such a timely topic, this evening event brought great turnout and feedback.



Catherine Steiner-Adair (left), and Liz Cohen

Erin Sanders will host our final event on **Body Image** at her home in Newton. Planned Parenthood's Amy Cody will lead a discussion about how to help children develop "body confidence" despite the unrealistic images in popular media. Look for additional information soon!

The series establishes Families First as a champion of reflective parenting and has garnered new support. We are always open to your comments; please contact any member of the Roundtable Committee. A special thanks to each of them: Alix Campbell, Gayle Dublin, Maria Gerrity, Rachel Kalvert (Chair), Meryl Kessler, Libby Moore, Erin Sanders, Jessica Shattuck, Jennifer Slemrod, and Judith Sydney!

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SAVE THE DATE: Leadership Circle Thank You! Event

Members of our Leadership Circle (families who have given a total of \$1,000 or more), please mark your calendars! May 1st is the date of our annual Thank You! event. This warm and fun event is our opportunity to thank you for all you do, update you on our new strategic plan, and celebrate our 25th anniversary. More information will be coming soon.

A huge thank you to our hosts, Meryl Kessler and Scott Oran, as well as our esteemed planning committee: Leslie Pucker, Judith Sydney, Molly Stearns, and Gayle Dublin.

Welcome Amber!

Amber Pittenger is our new Annual Fund/Special Events Coordinator!

Amber was recently the Director of the South End's Friday Night Supper Program. Each Friday, the 30-year-old hunger relief organization provides dinner for 150. Social responsibility emerged as a significant interest while volunteering with at-risk youth during her time at the University of California, Santa Cruz (she holds a degree in Photography).

As a volunteer and later, as a staff member of the Middlesex Boys & Girls Clubs, Amber saw the effects of positive and negative relationships on children's lives. But, she says, the reason Families First's mission resonates so strongly with her is her own family experience: She is the oldest of five children raised by a hard-working single mom. When asked how she is feeling about her new position she answered, "I am enthusiastic to join Families First as it enters a major phase of growth, and I look forward to working with the organization's community of supporters!"



Families First, Media Second, *continued*

too much guilt as they navigate this new territory. If we do, they may shut down, when we really want to keep them thinking and problem-solving. As Stokes said, "Families First helps parents think deeply about many aspects of parenting so they can make intentional decisions about who they want to be as parents and how they influence their kids." In regard to media, we intend to keep the conversation going.