

Teens Before Their Time

Families First's strategic plan can be summarized as, "Get great, then grow." We are working to maximize our impact and meet parents' needs throughout their kids' developmental journey. We have long offered a teen curriculum; last year we developed our first preteen series. We asked Dr. Maureen O'Brien, Curriculum & Training Manager, to tell us why parents need *Parenting Preteens* now. Read the full interview on Families First's blog: www.familiesfirstblog.org

MO: Parents need a lot of what's in the teen curriculum earlier, because the physical and emotional changes of adolescence are coming earlier! In the preteen years, kids are starting to see gray areas. They will try to negotiate—that's a good thing. It's also a time when kids naturally pull away from parents and become more involved with peers. This is not a time to be hands-off, however. It's important

important to be authoritative, but warm. Let them stretch their independence and skills. We used to talk a lot about risk taking; now we call it decision making. Let them practice now in lower-risk situations. They will need the skills they learn during their teen years.

It's tempting to make a comparison to what you were doing at their age, but don't. What kids encounter in the preteen years today is far more complex than what previous generations did—new hazards related to technology, maintaining a positive body image in a loaded media environment, and so on. Tell them what your values are, or they are going to get it from their peers.

There are two groups of parents: those who expect the early transition into adolescence and those who don't. Hearing from other parents in a workshop normalizes the behavior they are seeing *and* spurs them into action.

In our workshops, parents reflect on what they're good at and work on improving where they're lacking. We give them concrete suggestions for conflict resolution and problem-solving, how to ask open-ended questions, how to have conversations about risky behaviors, and how to supervise kids around technology.



Hungry for Connection

An immigrant from Ethiopia, Abebe was not used to too much food being a problem. But in America, the media was always sounding the alarm about obesity. She worried that her son,

Adnan, was eating too much, and money was tight anyway, so she limited his food. When she realized he was sneaking food and hiding it under his bed, she began to suspect he had an eating disorder.

She didn't know what to do, so when Adnan's school offered the new Families First workshop series *Parenting Preteens*, she attended. The Parenting Educator was dynamic and knowledgeable, but when it came to her concerns about her son, Abebe learned almost as much from the other parents.

As she told more and more details about the situation—that Adnan is an athlete, that he

is growing, that it was apples and other healthy foods he was sneaking—her peers offered support and shared knowledge from their own experience. They testified that being hungry constantly was normal for a boy Adnan's age. And, without judgment, they helped Abebe understand how damaging shaming kids about eating can be.

Because of you, high-quality, research-based content and expert Parenting Educators make Families First's workshops rich learning experiences for parents. By design, they are also opportunities for parents to connect and support each other as they work through common challenges.



PHOTO: KARA DELAHUNT
Parents Celebrate Completion of a Families First Series

Our Family is Growing!

Thanks to your support, right now is an exciting time at Families First. As we implement the strategic plan approved last spring, we are growing! We've welcomed three new staff members to new positions since the fiscal year began. In the new Grants Specialist position, **Jill Brevik** adds crucial fundraising capacity. **Dawn Shearer-Coren** provides rich, dynamic trainings for our Parenting Educators as Training Coordinator. As FUSE Coordinator, **Sherra Cates** works on developing partner relationships and scheduling activities with schools.



Left to Right: Jill Brevik, Dawn Shearer-Coren, Sherra Cates

And we're not done yet. We are hiring for two additional positions: the open Special Events & Annual Fund Coordinator position and our first Evaluation Manager (a key position as we implement our strategic plan). Full bios can be found on the website.

Giving Runs in the Family

Meryl Kessler has been involved with Families First for 13 years. She served on the Board of Directors from 2003 to 2010 (Chair, 2006 – 2008) and remains active. She was selected Nan Kay Volunteer of the Year in 2013, and last year was a valued participant in our strategic planning process. Since Meryl's relationship with Families First is long and deep, it's only fitting that recently her family got into the act. In honor of Meryl and her husband Scott Oran's 27th wedding anniversary, her in-laws made a donation to Families First—at the suggestion of their granddaughter! We are grateful to Meryl and her in-laws for their generosity.



To make a donation in honor of a loved one, visit www.families-first.org

Fathers' Breakfast Upcoming

The 13th Annual Fathers' Breakfast is fast approaching! Join us on **Thurs, October 30**, from 7:30 – 9am at the Mandarin Oriental Hotel as we celebrate fathers.

The keynote will be given by nationally known researcher Dr. Laurence Steinberg, who will share insights on parenting and educating teens from his new book, *The Age of Opportunity: Lessons from the New Science of Adolescence*.

For more information, visit: www.bit.ly/fathersbreakfast

Thank you to our Gold Sponsor:



Gatherings Speaker Series

Through the Gatherings Speaker Series, donors and new friends can learn first-hand about Families First's work while taking away useful ideas to inform their own parenting. This year, we have six Gatherings planned, around topics like *The Benefits of Losing* and *Peers and Peer Relationships*. Most Gatherings are hosted in private homes, intimate in size, and by invitation.

Two larger Gatherings are open to all. In collaboration with our partner The Second Step — a domestic violence shelter in Newton — we will screen the film *No Way Out But One* at the West Newton Cinema on the evening of February 5. A panel discussion about domestic violence with the film's director, Boston University professor Garland Waller; our own developmental psychologist, Dr. Maureen O'Brien; Second Step staff attorney Isabelle Thacker, and moderated by Liz Cohen will follow the showing. A second evening event addressing media, technology, and children will be held in Brookline in the Spring. Details will be posted on the events page of our website as they are available.

To be added to our mailing list for the Gatherings or for more information, please contact Rebekah McKinney at rmckinney@families-first.org.

Board of Directors

Michael Kohn, Co-Chair	Melissa Grossman
Jennifer Kordell, Co-Chair	Nancy Hill
Russell Oken, Treasurer	Robert Holmes
Stacy Dell'Orfano, Clerk	Rachel Kalvert
Angela Allen	Sean Lynch
Jennifer Amaya-Thompson	Jeff Murray
Jody Cornish	Margaret Potter
Gary Creem	Sukanya Ray
Gayle Dublin	Molly Stearns
Marjorie Freiman	Judith Sydney
	Susan O'Connor, Honorary