As a child and family therapist, I saw the positive changes that came with more parent involvement, and I began using parenting education as a regular component of my counseling. I began to realize that parenting education is something that can benefit all families. That is how Active Parenting began back in 1983.

This spring I had the pleasure of addressing the Prevent Child Abuse Iowa conference. It gave me an opportunity to reflect on all that I have learned about starting parenting groups in the past 25 years. Here are the top tips I have collected to help you launch successful parenting education in your community.

**Three Keys to a great group:**
1. Find or build a great curriculum.
2. Develop great group leadership skills.
3. Become a great promoter.

**1. Find or build a great curriculum.**
- Teach a parenting model, not just tips.
- Use video to stimulate interest and provide social modeling.
- Develop metaphors to help parents remember key points.
- Use experiential activities.
- Allow time for discussion.
- Provide “homework” assignments.
- Keep lectures brief and use visuals (such as PowerPoint).
- Include humor, emotion and good writing.
- Include a well-written parent’s guide or text.
- Make it theory-based with research evidence of effectiveness.

**2. Develop great group leadership skills.**
- Model what you teach: Be encouraging, be respectful and use good communication skills.
- Keep the group on pace.
- Postpone “What do I do?”-type questions until the appropriate time in the program.
- Invest in training for yourself.
- Invite participation, but do not pressure.
- Be ready to refer to counseling or other treatment when necessary.
- Focus group discussion on the topic.
- Use your personality: humor, warmth, energy, charisma.
- Sidestep power struggles.
- Encourage, encourage, encourage!

**3. Become a great promoter.**
- Get an existing organization to sponsor your course.
- Get the head of the organization to write a letter to parents.
- Include a flyer or brochure.
- Keep the enrollment fee affordable.
- Make a live presentation to a parents’ group, showing video clips and telling about the course.
- Sign up parents on the spot.
- Personally invite parents to attend your first group. (Target parent leaders, who can invite friends.)
- Use the Internet, newsletters, posters, flyers and letters to get the word out.

**With low-income parents:**
- Provide child care.
- Provide transportation.
- Provide a meal.
- Offer incentives—a raffle, door prizes, etc.
- But don’t water down your program!

For more FREE ideas and support for your parenting program, go to www.ActiveParenting.com and click on the “Leaders” tab.