Common Sense Parenting® (CSP) provides logical strategies and easy-to-learn techniques to address issues of communication, discipline, decision making, relationships, self-control and school success. These classes incorporate research-proven child-care methods that are derived directly from the Boys Town Treatment Family HomesSM program and adapted for use in the home by parents. Each skill and technique parents learn can be applied in any home environment and can help build and reinforce healthy family relationships.

A six-session CSP workshop (12 hours total) allows parents to learn, practice and demonstrate new parenting skills. These skills enable them to nurture their children’s development and combine affection and discipline to decrease negative behaviors while increasing positive ones.

CSP training provides parents an opportunity to learn and use new parenting skills in a neutral setting, which increases the likelihood they will use the skills with their children. Program components involve instruction, videotape modeling, role-playing, feedback and review. Professionally trained parent trainers teach the course and provide consultation and support. The program can be used alone or as a component of a more intensive family treatment program. The program was originally designed for parents of children ages 6 to 16, but an adaptation for parents of toddlers and preschoolers also is available.

A number of studies have been completed to test the effectiveness of Common Sense Parenting®. Results indicate that parents who attend and complete the program report improved parenting skills and reduced child behavior problems, which are maintained after parents complete the classes. The program has shown positive effects with a wide range of parents and children, and is currently listed on national registries of evidence-based practice.

CSP classes help parents:

- Reduce children’s problem behavior
- Minimize problems that disrupt family life
- Build strong, healthy relationships

CSP teaches parents valuable skills, including how to:

- Communicate effectively
- Avoid power struggles
- Give positive attention
- Control their emotions
- Balance discipline with affection
- Praise their child’s good behavior
- Be a better, more engaged and caring parent
At Boys Town, we constantly measure the effectiveness of our child and family programs to ensure those we serve actually get better. The Boys Town National Research Institute™ conducts applied research that focuses on understanding the nature of problems children and their families face today and identifying the most effective ways to help them.

Preliminary evaluations of CSP have produced positive results, and the program is in widespread use, annually serving more than 1,500 children from 1,000 families at Boys Town sites across the United States. It also is disseminated through other agencies in 47 states and 14 foreign countries.

CSP and Evidence-Based Practice Registries

Common Sense Parenting® is an evidence-based service rated as “promising” on the registries of Find Youth Info and the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention Model Programs Guide. It is also rated as “promising” by the California Evidence-Based Clearinghouse for Child Welfare.

Research Summary

- Early studies examined CSP results based on parent and family characteristics. Results indicated improvement in child behavior, parent attitudes, family satisfaction and parent problem-solving ability. Additionally, CSP participants reported statistically and clinically significant reductions in child behavior problems that were maintained at a three-month follow-up.

- Research conducted with children with significant behavior problems in three age groups (2-5 years, 6-11 years and 12-16 years) from CSP programs in Florida, Nebraska and Texas indicated that parents with children in all the age groups reported significant reductions in child behavior problems after completing CSP classes.

- In a quasi-experimental study, CSP participants were compared to a wait-list control group and were found to have experienced more improvement in externalizing child problems, parent satisfaction and efficacy, and family satisfaction than control parents, with results maintained through a three-month follow-up.

- Results from participants at three CSP replication sites (Florida, Nebraska and Texas) mirrored those from prior studies and indicated significant reductions in child behavior problems and significant improvements in family satisfaction for parents with a wide range of characteristics.

- A large-scale evaluation study examined the effects of CSP as a child physical abuse-prevention program with parents from U.S. Air Force bases throughout the world. CSP participants reported decreased child behavior problems, improved relationships with family members and a reduced potential for child physical abuse. Results were maintained at a six-month follow-up.

- A recent evaluation of CSP with a high-risk sample of parents was completed as part of a doctoral dissertation project and in collaboration with the Center for At-Risk Children’s Services at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln. Participants, many with significant risk factors, were referred to the CSP program through various sources. Results revealed statistically significant increases in positive parenting beliefs and practices, and reductions in parenting stress and parent-reported child behavior problems.

For more information on CSP research, go to: boystown.org/approach/research/applied-research-bibliography and click “Download a copy of the Bibliography.” Click on “Common Sense Parenting®” in the Table of Contents.