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PEOPLE Make A DIFFERENCE

THE NURTURING CENTER
146 THIRD AVE. WEST
KALISPELL, MT 59901

Nurturing Center offers support for parents

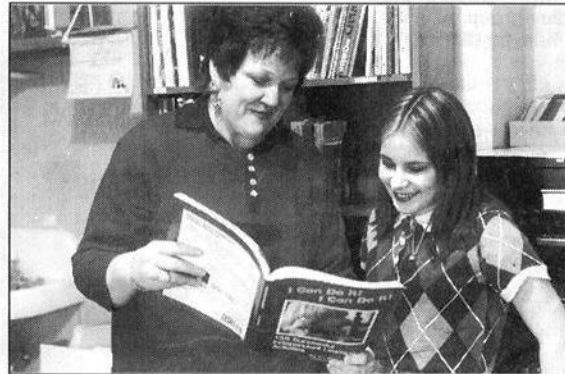
By Diana Blend
Inter Lake Advertising Writer

With the increased stress that families face today, parents are ever more challenged in the process of raising children.

Whether still-married, single, divorced, or remarried, parents need to be the best they can be. All parents, including adolescent parents, grandparents, step-parents, and first-time parents need to learn to how to effectively raise their children (or grandchildren) with as little stress as possible.

Fortunately, parents in the Flathead Valley can go to the Nurturing Center in downtown Kalispell for a variety of parenting courses, support services and one-on-one help. At the Nurturing Center, parents learn good communication skills and positive discipline approaches. They also learn from one another by sharing their experiences.

Since 1989, the non-profit organization, has been strengthening local families through parent education. Executive director Susan Cristofferson, who is herself a parent, will be the first to admit that with the joys of parenting come the chal-



Vickie Rinke, director of the Gemini Program, visits over a book with ninth grader Krista Ritter at the Nurturing Center's resource library. The Gemini Program is a mentoring program for ninth-grade girls and is one of many programs under the Nurturing Center's umbrella.

lenges.

"Part of trusting yourself as a parent is knowing when you need new information," said Susan. And, that new information can be accessed any time during the long haul of raising a child.

"As parents, we need to know when children behave in certain ways and why," added Susan.

Classes offered at the Nurturing Center include information on the behaviors and abilities that parents can

expect of their children. By anticipating the stages of childhood development, parents learn to interact with their children in a positive manner without feeling overwhelmed. And, once parents discover they can always learn more about their child's development, they begin to relax and trust themselves more.

The center's "Power Struggles" course, for instance, has been highly attended by parents through-

out the valley. A new "Power Struggles" class is slated to start in Columbia Falls as part of a collaborative effort with Head Start. The course helps parents target difficult ages and stages, when to expect conflict, and how to deal with it. Other parenting courses are scheduled on an as-needed basis.

Support groups are also another way in which the Nurturing Center helps parents cope. In these groups, parents who are dealing with the same issues learn from one another and feel less isolated.

Currently, the Nurturing Center offers ongoing "Parentshare" groups, a "Father's Support Group," a "Parents in Recovery" group (co-sponsored by Flathead Valley Chemical Dependency Clinic.) and an "Up with Downs" group for parents of children with Downs Syndrome.

A "Divorce Adjustment Group" for divorced parents and their children is also offered through the center. Since last summer, these courses have been mandated through the divorce court system. Parents enroll in separate adult groups; at the same time, their children attend a kids' group which

facilitates their adjustment to the divorce as well.

The "Father's Support Group," facilitated by Philip Crissman, provides emotional support for dads. The group, which meets the second Tuesday night of each month, includes divorced, widowed and step-fathers.

Other unique programs are sponsored by the Nurturing Center. The "Gemini Program," for instance, serves as a mentoring program for ninth grade girls who are at risk of dropping out of school and/or of getting pregnant. This valuable program, under the direction of Vickie Rinke, matches an adult woman, who is not a relative, to each girl. The mentor then volunteers to spend time with her match as the pair sees fit.

The center's "Child Care Program" covers the cost child care for those on public assistance getting back to work. The program also helps provide training for area child care providers. The Nurturing Center also provides reimbursements to providers who prepare meals that meet national nutritional guidelines.

For more information call the Nurturing Center at 756-1414.