

Parenting support is one click, or call, away

By BRENDA GARRETT

CARING FOR children, or failing to do so, has seldom seen more media coverage than in the past year. With last week's verdict in the Casey Anthony murder case, we have to ask ourselves as a community, "How can we better prepare young people to be loving and effective parents?"

The next generation of parents does not have enough opportunities to learn about parenting before having children. What do they know about the importance of nurturing, for example, or the stages of child development, positive discipline and proper nutrition?

When young adults — or mature adults, for that matter — have children before they're emotionally and financially ready, the risks of child abuse and neglect increase substantially. Any parent lacking the resources to feed his or her children or provide stable housing is understandably less prepared to deal with the everyday stresses of raising little ones.

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Add the challenges of a mental illness, or disability, or past child abuse to the mix, and the parent and child need outside help.

Families in Hampton Roads have a valuable resource at their fingertips. KidsPriorityOne is a free information and referral service operated by the YMCA of South Hampton Roads, partnering with the Kiwanis Children's Council.

KidsPriorityOne hosts an information line at 757-CHILDREN (244-5373) and website (kidspriorityone.org) containing valuable parenting information and resources.

Parents and family service professionals from the Southside and Peninsula can search the database for myriad services, many of them free. Find everything from prenatal services to early childhood resources to educational support to college prep for teens. There are emergency services, as well as arts and cultural programs, summer camps, jobs, play groups, parenting classes and counseling.

The program receives calls every day from families needing help. Sometimes it's a general parenting question; other times, Child Protective Services has been involved. A family may be living in a car with three children. A couple is facing divorce. Regardless, this website is a valuable tool for families in Hampton Roads.

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