

Alabama's Parenting Assistance Line

**Satellite Conference and Live Webcast
Thursday, March 22, 2012
10:00 a.m. – 12:00 p.m. Central Time**

**Produced by the Alabama Department of Public Health
Video Communications and Distance Learning Division**

Faculty

**Sally Edwards
Director
Child Development Resources
The University of Alabama**

**Marian Loftin, MA
Child Advocate**

Faculty

**Tammy Morrow
Parent Resources Specialist
Parenting Assistance Line**

**Valerie Thorington
Assistant Director
Child Development Resources
The University of Alabama**

***"Parenting is easy. . .
until you have children."***

– Anonymous

Alabama's Parenting Assistance Line

- **Even in the best circumstances,
parenting can be tough!**

PAL's Inception

- **Began with Mrs. Patsy Riley**
 - **Alabama's former First Lady**
- **Vision**
 - **To provide parents the kind of
support they need to become more
confident and successful parents**

Alabama's Parenting Assistance Line

- Launched in March 2007
- Provides information, support, and tools to parents and families across the state of Alabama
- Services for the Hispanic families were added in 2010
 - Increase in population

PAL Has Been A Collaborative Effort Of:

- The University of Alabama
- The Children's Trust Fund of Alabama
- Alabama Department of Human Resources
- Alabama Department of Mental Health

PAL Has Been A Collaborative Effort Of:

- The Office of Alabama's First Lady
- Wal-Mart Corporation

Alabama's Parenting Assistance Line

- The PAL line has been fully operational for 5 years
- Over 11,400 calls have been received
 - Including nights and weekends
- Calls have been received from virtually every county in Alabama as well as 30 other states and Canada

PAL Is . . .

- Free
- Confidential
- Anonymous

Alabama's Parenting Assistance Line

- A statewide phone line
- Available Monday through Friday
 - 8 am – 8 pm

What to Expect

- When parents call the toll-free number a parent resource specialist will answer the phone, listen, then offer helpful information and support
- 1 – 866 – 962 – 3030

Parent Resource Specialists

- Hold undergraduate or graduate degrees in Human Development and Family Studies or closely related field
- Have received additional specialized training

Parent Resource Specialists

- Parents often call PAL when they're under great stress, frustrated, or angry
- Parent Resource Specialists practice:
 - Active listening – Concern
 - Validation – Compassion

Parent Resource Specialists

- Sometimes parents just need to know they are “heard”

PAL Calls

- Range from “typical” parenting issues:
 - Toilet training
 - Sleeping
 - Feeding
 - School-related issues
 - Back-talk

PAL Calls

- More serious situations
 - Children with disabilities
 - Serious behavioral disorders
 - Alcohol/drug issues
 - Cutting
 - Pregnant teens
 - Children from abusive situations

PAL Calls

- Callers may also request free literature about their specific parenting concerns as well as information regarding specific resources in their county so referrals may be made

Alabama's Parenting Assistance Line

- PAL believes that families benefit when parents understand:
 - Their child's development
 - The skills needed for effective parenting

Alabama's Parenting Assistance Line

- When they have the opportunity to talk through their specific parenting situation or concern, parents feel:
 - Less stressed
 - More capable and confident
 - Better able to cope

Alabama's Parenting Assistance Line

- Parents can "talk it out" not "take it out" on their children!

www.pal.ua.edu

- PAL's website provides practical parenting and developmental information on:
 - Guidance and discipline
 - Health and safety
 - Talking with your child
 - Handling stress
 - Parent support

Who Are Parent Resource Specialists?

- Degreed individuals
 - Undergraduate or graduate

Who Are Parent Resource Specialists?

- Received specialized training prior to actively taking calls
 - Extensive training and review of manual included information related to risk factors for child abuse and neglect, strength based approach in relating to parents, tools for taking calls, reflective listening, asking open-ended questions, general guidelines and procedures for taking calls, etc.

Who Are Parent Resources Specialists?

- Participated in role-play of potential kinds of callers, kinds of calls, and family situations to gain confidence
- “Shadowed” a Parent Resource Specialist answering calls to listen, then ask questions

Who Are Parent Resources Specialists?

- Took actual calls with a Parent Resource Specialist available who was able to “mentor”
- Went “live” on the line with parents!

On-going Training

- ADD/ADHD/Bi-polar disorder
- Laws and resources for families with special needs children
- Post-traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD)
- Staff self-care
 - Compassion fatigue/vicarious trauma

On-going Training

- Discipline, parenting, and family systems issues
- Issues and resources related to domestic abuse
- Addictions and related issues
- HIV/AIDS
- Statewide services
 - 211, Salvation Army, UCP

PAL Calls

- The vast majority of calls have been from moms who have discussed parent support/ parental stress issues

Who Else Calls PAL?

- Grandparents and other family members who are primary caregivers
- Fathers: single fathers, divorced fathers, and step-fathers
- Professionals who are seeking a resource for a client, childcare providers, and those who are interested in receiving materials to share with others

PAL Calls

- Overall, ages of children discussed during the calls reflect a higher percentage of preschoolers (3-6 years) and schoolagers (6-12 years)

PAL Calls

- Most calls are received:
 - On Mondays and Wednesdays
 - Mid-morning and mid-afternoon
 - Some escalation during May, June, and August

PAL Calls

- Over 55% of callers heard about PAL through TV or radio
- The website indicates almost 47,000 visits from 126 countries on 6 continents

The Primary Topics of Concern

- Parental stress and support
- Discipline and guidance
- Development
- Health and safety
- Grief
- Coping with life's changes

Types of Callers

- Crisis
 - Require immediate attention and usually entail the potential for harm
- Development/discipline/parenting issues
 - Usually experiencing stress from things that are common in the course of child development

Types of Callers

- **Informational**
 - Generally want to know what PAL is or general information about children or parenting
- **Other family member or concerned person (3rd party)**
 - Usually very concerned about a situation they are close to

Types of Callers

- **Child abuse/neglect callers**
 - Reports that there is immediate threat of severe harm to themselves or others or feels like they could harm themselves or others
 - Calls can be traced if needed

Types of Callers

- **Inappropriate callers**
 - May try to talk about inappropriate personal information or try to get personal information from staff person

Types of Callers

- **Chronic callers**
 - Frequent callers who may want to talk about issues related or not to parenting
 - May call several times a week or even daily

Quite Frequently the “Issue” Is Not the Issue

- **The vast majority of our calls are multi-dimensional**
 - Parents are dealing with several issues at once and the pressure becomes overwhelming

Quite Frequently the “Issue” Is Not the Issue

- **Oftentimes during our conversations we find the caller starts off stating a matter-of-fact problem seemingly looking for a simple answer**
 - As we continue, the caller will open up and the layers will be peeled back to reveal the core of the stress

Parental Stress and Support

- Divorce
- Single-parenting
- Blended families
- Family crisis
- Financial distress
- Everyday coping skills

Discipline and Guidance

- Seeking more effective discipline methods
- Re-defining discipline
- Authoritarian vs. authoritative practices
- How to accomplish a successful “time out”
- How to handle tantrums

Discipline and Guidance

- Talking back
- Chores
- How to pick your battles
- Consistency
- Setting rules and boundaries
- Teaching responsibility
- Homework
- Adolescent rebellion

Developmental Concerns

- Is my child on track?
- When should a baby start solids?
- Why is my 3-year-old not potty trained?
- The teacher says my child is immature for his age. What does that mean?

Developmental Concerns

- What age can I leave my children alone?
- Why is my teen embarrassed to be seen with me?
- Is it okay to let my 16 year old have a party with alcohol as long as it's at my home and I am there?

Health and Safety Issues

- Breastfeeding
- Bedwetting
- How much should my toddler be sleeping?
- Does secondhand smoke really hurt children?
- When can my child stop using a car seat?

Health and Safety Issues

- My child's school will not cooperate with his/her health issues
- How can I get my kids motivated to play outside?
- How do I get my child to eat healthier foods?
- My child is a picky eater. What can I do?

What Parents Are Saying About PAL

"It is so encouraging to know that there are people who care and can provide support and information for parents. I have learned some helpful ideas and put them into practice – it works!"

– Mother of 2 preschoolers

What Parents Are Saying About PAL

"Thank you for all your encouragement! I needed to know that I am doing something right!"

– Mom of a typical 2 year old... beginning to potty train and experiencing temper tantrums

What Parents Are Saying About PAL

"I used to call all the time when I lived in Alabama. We are having such a difficult time with our daughter that I decided to call again. I'm glad I did."

– Mom of a 14 year old concerned with the difficulties her daughter was experiencing after an out-of-state move

What Parents Are Saying About PAL

"Thank you for answering. I called a National Hotline and got a recording. I really need to talk to someone."

– Mom called because she discovered her daughter was cutting herself

What Parents Are Saying About PAL

"Thank you for all the help you've been today. I feel more confident about what I need to do. Your ideas are so practical and I feel I was able to connect with someone who understands."

– Mom of 11 year old daughter showing aggressive and disobedient behaviors

What Parents Are Saying About PAL

"This program is wonderful. I am so glad PAL is here to help parents during this time!"

– Father of preschooler who developed fears after 2011 tornadoes

What Parents Are Saying About PAL

"Things are so hard right now that I just don't always know which way to turn. I really just sometimes need someone to talk to."

– Newly single father frustrated with the difficulty of finding adequate child care

What Parents Are Saying About PAL

"I think I was having a 'moment.' I was at my wit's end and did not want to spank my child!"

– Mom of a preschooler

What Parents Are Saying About PAL

"I have had this number for over a year. I wished I had called sooner. You have no idea how much just getting these feelings out has helped. I have felt like such a failure as a mother for so long!"

– Mom of daughter experiencing early puberty and dealing with thoughts of suicide and serious depression

What Parents Are Saying About PAL

"Thank you for your encouraging words. When you are going through tough times you can begin to doubt your capabilities as a parent."

– Mother of preteen diagnosed with ADD and Bi-polar Disorder

What Parents Are Saying About PAL

"I wanted to thank you for talking with me and giving me such good ideas about communicating with my daughter. I now know that I can talk with her instead of just at her!"

– Single father of 13 year old daughter

**What Parents Are Saying
About PAL**

"I never knew that infants and toddlers could be so affected by divorce. I didn't really think they knew what was going on . . . I am going to try to be more sensitive to what they are experiencing."

– Newly divorced mom

**What Parents Are Saying
About PAL**

"I do feel much calmer now. I was really beginning to wonder if I could handle this child much longer. I felt I had tried everything . . . "

– Grandmother raising her abused 4 year old grandchild

**What Parents Are Saying
About PAL**

"I appreciate the time you took with me today. For the first time in a long time I really feel as if I was being heard."

– Mom of teen daughter

"PAL Is the Best Idea Ever!"

- Parenting can be tough and with today's stresses and problems we all just need a little help. . .

Contact PAL

1 – 866 – 962 – 3030

www.pal.ua.edu