Why Nurturing: At a time when the media chronicles acts of violence and abuse, what could be more important than promoting health and nurturing in the family, where children learn the values and beliefs that shape their lives? The Nurturing Parenting Program is an internationally recognized, group-based approach for working with parents and their children in reducing dysfunction and building healthy, positive interactions. Developed by Stephen J. Bavolek, Ph.D., the program in Fairfax County is sponsored by the Department of Family Services.

Philosophy: The Nurturing Parenting Program is based on the philosophy that parenting is learned; the way parents were raised directly influences the way they raise their children. The program addresses the need many parents have to learn new, nurturing behaviors in place of others that may be hurtful to children. A basic tenet of the nurturing philosophy is that all parents would rather build happy, healthy interactions in their families than continue to live with problems they were never taught to solve.

Mission: In partnership with our community and with a commitment to quality service, the Program promotes self-reliance in families and individuals by providing essential knowledge and resources tailored to the needs of children, adolescents, and adults.

Goals: * To increase parents' and children's understanding, empathy, and respect for the needs of other family members as well as other members of the community * To help families build strong, positive relationships among all members * To expand parents' knowledge of the appropriate developmental capabilities and needs of children * To heighten parents' and children's positive self-concept and self-esteem; and * To offer alternatives to hitting (including spanking) and yelling

Who is Eligible: Families living in Fairfax County who want to build healthy interactions and create positive change within their family and community

Other Criteria: * Participants must make a commitment to complete the entire program as a family. * 100% attendance at the first four sessions is strongly encouraged to allow the group process to develop. * Participants with a history of substance abuse must have completed the initial phase of a treatment program.

Winner of the 2000 National Association of Counties “Acts of Caring” Award
At this time three different Nurturing Parenting Programs are being offered through the Fairfax County Department of Family Services. These programs are special in that both parents and children attend the classes (though children are taught in different classrooms than parents), all programs are free, and all classes offer childcare for the 0 – 4 age range. Ten to twelve families participate in a typical class. Evening programs include a light dinner. For the age 5 – 11 Program and the Parent and Adolescent Program, children over childcare age are taught lessons that are fitting for their ages and development. Two of the four programs listed below are offered in both English and Spanish; the other programs (for Parents and Adolescents, and An Emphasis on African American Culture) are offered only in English.

1. **Program for Parents and Children Ages Birth to 4 years**: a 21-session program in which parents increase their understanding of feelings, build healthy parenting routines, explore ways to discipline without using physical punishment, increase their knowledge of child development, build self-esteem in themselves and their children, and learn more ways to have fun as a family. (Program is offered in English and Spanish.)

2. **Program for Parents and Children Ages 5 to 11 Years**: a 13-session program in which parents and children increase their understanding of other’s feelings and learn healthy ways to express those feelings. Parents learn how to encourage desirable behaviors in their children, learn ways to discipline without using physical punishment, build self-concept and self-esteem, and learn more ways to have fun as a family. (Program is offered in English and Spanish.)

3. **Program for Parents and Adolescents**: a 12-session program in which family members learn how to communicate better and to recognize each others’ needs, learn to understand what adolescence is about, find out how to make good decisions, increase self-esteem, and learn more ways to have fun as a family. (Program is offered only in English at this time.)

4. **Program for Parents and Children with an Emphasis on African American Culture**: The core program for this curriculum is the same as the basic Nurturing Parenting curriculum at that age level. However, this curriculum also emphasizes how African-American history has affected the current life process for African-Americans, and it includes topics such as the slave experience, transcending oppression and acculturation, spirituality, and accessing resources. Other topics discussed include: empowerment of the African-American family, the prevalent forms of discipline within the African-American community, the affect of oppression and the media on African-American families, and the importance of community. (Program is offered only in English.)

**Structure of classes**: The classes typically run from 5:30 – 8:00 p.m. one evening/week for the duration of the program. Dinner is served at either 5:30 or 6:30 p.m., depending on the class. Parents and children are together only during the dinner time. Otherwise, parents are in their own classroom, while children are grouped in classrooms according to age.