

# Family forum

## Join us for the MCFR Spring Conference!

By Stephen Onell, Conference Co-Chair

The Minnesota Council on Family Relations proudly presents a very special spring conference at North Como Presbyterian Church in Roseville, MN on Friday, April 26, 2002. Conference registration begins at 8:30 a.m. and the final workshop session ends at 4:00 p.m. The conference location is a beautiful church with easy access and parking.

The conference will begin with a welcome, opening remarks and conference logistics. Following this, a special multimedia slide/music presentation on Allan Jackson's country hit, "Where were you when the world stopped turning on that September day?" will be shown, followed by a brief audience reaction/discussion.

The keynote address will begin at 9:30 am. Jim Greenman, author of, "What Happened to the World: Helping Children Cope in Turbulent Times", will present the keynote. Sixteen

workshops will be offered in three sessions providing hands-on resources for family professionals.

The day will focus on working with families in a world that has changed in many ways since the events of September 11. As family professionals, we must find new approaches, topics and tools to use in our work with parents, children and our own organizations. The goal of this conference is to share the research, resources and tools we have found helpful in working with families at this time.

Conference attendees will receive a copy of Jim Greenman's book, What Happened to the World? Helping Children Cope in Turbulent Times, as well as the accompanying facilitators guide as part of their conference materials. These tools, along with other information and materials given at the sessions, are tools for "Peace, Hope and Healing."

Minnesota  
Council on  
Family  
Relations

State Affiliate  
of the  
National Council on  
Family Relations

Spring 2002

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### MCFR 2002 Spring Conference

**TOOLS** *for Peace, Hope  
& Healing*

Friday, April 26

North Como Presbyterian Church

965 Larpenteur Ave West, Roseville, MN

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## A Note from the MCFR President

Marcie Brooke, MCFR 2002 President



Marcie Brooke

Minnesota Council on Family Relations

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The media reminds us daily of the state of our world. The kindness, commitment and healing that were demonstrated after 9/11 must continue as we move forward with our lives. Friday, April 26, MCFR's Spring conference will provide sound "tools" to do just that.

Our keynote speaker is Jim Greenman; educator, researcher and author. He will share his research and expertise and a copy of his book and a facilitator's guide entitled, *What Happened to the World: Helping Children Cope in Turbulent Times*. The breakout sessions, sixteen in all, offer various "tools" to assist us in our work and in our families.

As president, my goals are to increase professional and student membership, to engage our current members in active policy issues, and to communicate throughout our state the value Minnesota Council on Family Relations offers. Often, I think we are a well-kept secret.

In my work, I see numerous benefits to sharing our organization with the business world. The various departments of human resources, communication, benefits, training and development, career and resource development all benefit from our expertise. It is a different world today. The 24/7 world of work and family affects each and every one of us at various times.

Educating one another and others on the research, the knowledge, and the systems in family education help the business world as well as the service world. Retention, orientation, training and retraining, productivity, morale, health, work redesign are all areas that directly affect the bottom line.

NCFR provides valuable services to state affiliates besides the above mentioned. THE PRESIDENT'S FUND, originally established by Eleanor Luckey in her term as NCFR president, provides state councils with extra seed money for special projects in their states. It is a matching grant requiring a proposal and is given on first come, first serve basis each year. This fund may help greater Minnesota become a stronger voice in MCFR. You may have ideas for using seed money to assist MCFR in reaching new members.

As we gather on April 26 for the spring conference and communicate via the listserv,

let us, as members, reach out recruit a new member. Share the great resource MCFR can be to businesses, to communities and to our families.

I welcome your thoughts, issues, ideas and concerns. Together we will keep MCFR one of the strongest state affiliates. Thank you, for the work you do for families.



MCFR Board Members at the 2002 Retreat

## Family Policy Needs Involved Family Professionals

By Madge Alberts, Program Coordinator

Children, Youth and Family Consortium, University of Minnesota

With the complex and often contentious issues that can occur in the public policy arena, it's way too easy to sit back and assume that we can't have an impact. But as family professionals, as citizens/residents of Minnesota, and as constituents, we not only CAN influence policy, but we must.

Family Policy is a term that is used frequently, but often misunderstood. Family policy is not policy that promotes a particular stance or belief, nor is it partisan. Rather, family policy is a more general concept that is concerned with the family as the basic social institution. It refers to all policies that address, directly or indirectly, the problems and issues families face in society. Policies about, marriage, divorce, adoption, welfare reform, schools and child care all have a direct impact on families. Families are indirectly affected by policies about discrimination, jobs, economics, affordable housing, transportation, and agriculture, for example.

Family policy includes not only policies developed by elected officials and governmental agencies from the township level to the federal level, and even internationally, but also those developed by the workplace, community agencies, faith communities and others. Family policy can be laws and policies developed to carry out those laws, or policies developed to help make organizations, including businesses, accomplish their work.

Family Policy can also be a lens - or a perspective - through which one looks to assess how any policy will affect families. Family Impact Seminars, now based at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, has provided this kind of assessment for many years. A booklet developed recently by the National Council on Family Relations, *Public Policy Through A Family Lens*, explains this view of family policy.

Family professionals have often been frustrated in the policymaking process because sound research isn't used effectively in the development of policies. There are a number of reasons for this disconnectedness between policy and research, but that discussion is beyond the scope of this article.

Your professional experience working with families can be one very important contribution to the policy making process. Wherever you see policies being formed, if you are aware of research that would contribute to a decision in the best interest of families, get that research in the hands of the people making the decisions. Explain it, if you have the opportunity, and cite your own professional experience that supports it. This access to research and practice is one way family professionals can enhance the policymaking process, and help to address some of the potential unintended consequences of policies.

Other things you can do, as professionals and constituents, to be more involved in policy-making include:

Take stands on issues that are important to you, personally and professionally. Make sure the positions you take and opinions you form are reasonable, balanced and informed.

Communicate your positions with policymakers, as appropriate, within your professional context.

- Track policy development - offer comments along the way.
- Observe workplace policies, and offer research or professional exper-

tise in helping make them more conducive to family well-being.

- If you are in a to set policies for your workplace or agency, make sure they reflect practices that contribute to family well-being.
- Participate in your local policy-making bodies, such as precinct caucuses, and vote in every election, no matter how small or insignificant it may seem.
- Get involved in community issues, decision-making, and initiatives, and bring your expertise as a family professional to the table.
- No matter where policy is developed, much of it affects families, directly and indirectly, in large and small ways. The expertise of family professionals can help ensure that policies enable families to function in ways that contribute to their overall well-being.

### Sources

- Bogenschneider, Karen, Jonathan R. Olson, Kirsten D. Linney, Jessica Mills, 2000: *Connecting Research and Policymaking: Implications for Theory and Practice from the Family Impact Seminars*. Family Relations: Vol. 49, No. 3, pp. 327-339.
- National Council on Family Relations, *Public Policy Through A Family Lens*, December, 2000.
- Zimmerman, Shirley. *Family Policy: Constructed Solutions to Family Problems*. Sage Publications, 2001.

***Your professional experience working with families can be one very important contribution to the policy making process.***

## ***Let's Communicate!*** **MCFR Web Site and ListServe**

With the assistance and support of the National Council on Family Relations (NCFR), MCFR now has an updated web site! Please check it out and bookmark: [www.ncfr.org/mncfr](http://www.ncfr.org/mncfr)

MCFR also has a new List Serve. This is a wonderful communication tool for the MCFR members! But it is only as useful as we make it – please take this opportunity to make a difference. Watch for monthly information, as MCFR Board Members are taking responsibility to send messages each month. Board Members hope that every member will send out relevant professional information on children, youth and families at any time! To join the lists serve, please e-mail your e-mail address to [pepper@ncfr.org](mailto:pepper@ncfr.org).

**[www.ncfr/mncfr](http://www.ncfr/mncfr)**

## **Public Policy Committee Opportunities!**

***The Minnesota Council on Family Relations is re-activating it's Policy Committee. Watch for details on the MCFR list serve which was established recently. If you're interested in participating in the committee, contact one of the co-chairs (Madge Alberts, [malberts@umn.edu](mailto:malberts@umn.edu) or Rose Allen, [allen027@umn.edu](mailto:allen027@umn.edu)).***

## **Minnesota Council on Family Relations**

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# Answering Children's Questions About Terror, War or Crisis

By Jim Greenman

September 11, like any huge disaster forces us out of our everyday reality into the all too real world of life and death issues, politics, and morality. The aftermath of any disaster leaves us not only with difficult feelings and perhaps physical destruction, but also with hard questions as well. Children need the opportunity to talk about the feelings and issues that are expressed by those around them and in the news - with each other and with adults. Children may ask questions that test our fundamental social and political views: "Why do people hate America so much?" "Why are those people so poor?" "Do you believe in war?" "What do you think of those Middle Eastern countries?" "Are Americans the good guys and the terrorists always the bad guys They may ask complex spiritual and moral questions: "Why do people die?" "Will I have to kill somebody?" "Why do some people die and some live?" "Why do we have so much and they are starving?" "Is it sometimes right to kill - even children?"

Children need our thoughtfulness and our honesty. No child will ever look back and say, "Gee, thanks for lying to me". They need our most thoughtful response, whatever our politics or spiritual beliefs.

Before talking to children:

## Get your own feelings and thoughts straight.

Try to be your most thoughtful, calm, and emotionally stable self when you talk to children. Be prepared for the inevitable difficult questions about why people kill, why war happens, why people die, and why people hate.

## Think not only about what you want to say, but also about how you want it to come across.

Depending on our words, tone, and body language, we may project calm, thoughtfulness, sadness, anger, or vengeful self-righteousness. How do we want the child to think and feel about us as human beings?

## Ask children what they think the words that they are using (war, terrorism, Arab, Islam, army) mean and what feelings they are having.

Understand what they know and feel before beginning any dialogue.

## Find opportunities to ask what's on the child's mind and follow his or her lead. Recognize the clues in a child's art, play, or conversations with friends and accept their feelings.

Don't assume either a lack of interest or a strong interest without checking first. When you encourage a young child to draw or ask a child about his or her feelings, you give permission to them to think and feel scary or angry thoughts and to express them freely.

## Acknowledge feelings: Share your feelings, but always be strong.

Children need adults to be strong in a crisis. You may be sad, scared, confused, or angry, and you can share your feelings, but be your strongest self. The child needs to draw on your strength.



## Offer the reassurance you can.

Help the child get the response that he or she needs: from saying, "Lots and lots of strong, clever people are working hard to keep us safe," to reading a newspaper article on efforts to prevent terrorism or improve airport security with an older child, or sharing hugs that say, "I'm here for you."

## With younger children, try to control images that will define war or terrorism

### in the child's mind.

The child hasn't seen much of life and can easily feel that everything, everyone, everywhere is coming apart; everyone is hurt or going to be hurt. The quantity and intensity of television, radio, and newspaper coverage as well as adult conversation during a crisis can easily frighten children, and adults must try to manage those images. Very young children often do not understand that one incident generates a week of repeated images.

## Respect the growing ability of school-age children and teenagers to understand issues, and be honest with them.

Many older children for the first time may become interested in larger issues of life in other countries, the military, war and peace, world religions, poverty, tolerance, and life and death. They also can become interested in the gory details of death and destruction.

## Stay tuned in to the individual child.

Keep listening, asking, conversing with, and reassuring as the child's thoughts and feelings evolve. Don't provide more information than the child needs to know.

## Make the tragedy or conflict understandable to the child.

Every child is different, and the explanation of national and world events needs to match the child's developmental understanding.

## Protect your child's idealism.

Children are idealists. For them, the world is a good place, people are mostly good, and life is worth living. Sudden exposure to violence and the possibility of destruction test their idealism and ours. If children are exposed to too much of life's dark side and too much pessimism, they may lose their sense of optimism and feeling that life is manageable.

## In every conversation, stay alert to signs of racism and stereotyping and work for cross-cultural understanding and respect for others. Be at your best as a human being.

In times of conflict, "us versus them" mentalities, ethnic stereotypes, and contempt for behavior and practices that

## Answering children's Questions About Terror, War or Crisis

are different to the mainstream lead to racism and cultural bias that is often unintentional, but damaging nonetheless. More than ever, it is time to recognize and appreciate cultural differences and teach children to accept and respect all ethnic groups and religions. Children need us to model tolerance, respect for diversity, and the need to learn about other people, cultures and countries.

**Be alert for opportunities to steer a child toward helping actively; find his or her strength and goodness.**

The feelings of powerlessness and helplessness shared both by children and adults are alleviated through action. There are hundreds of ways to connect with others around

the world and show our common humanity: for example pen friends, fund raising or donating money, cultural exchanges, and community work.

Like it or not September 11 thrust children into the complicated adult world. Our job is to listen to them, try to understand their emerging views, and help them come to terms with the complexities and realities in a way that leads them to become global citizens determined to make the world a better place.

Excerpted from What Happened to the World? Helping Children Cope in Turbulent Times by Jim Greenman

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# READER'S CORNER: Fresh Perspectives for Work with Families

By Ted Bowman

In this issue of Reader's Corner, you are invited to consider one volume that could be described as a core text or resource, and an unusually thoughtful book about grandparenting.

Each volume pushed my ways of thinking to new areas. Even as a long-time family educator, Powell and Cassidy's perspectives stretched me. Finally, Margaret Hall helped this grandfather of four consider grandparenting as a special vocation.

Consider adding these volumes to your library.

## Family life education: an introduction

(2001) by Lane H. Powell and Dawn Cassidy. Mountain View, CA: Mayfield Publishing Company. Hardback.

There are some books that don't get the visibility they deserve. And this is one of those. Well-known family educators Lane Powell and Dawn Cassidy have written a splendid text that also deserves a wider audience than the one to which it is directed. This volume is written for undergraduate family life or family education use. I commend it to veteran family educators and family therapists as well.

Easily accessible and comprehensive, Powell and Cassidy invite the reader to consider key themes in family education. Mixing case studies or examples with ample references, the reader moves through theory and history to practice to personal reflection, and program implementation.

I could, for self-serving reasons, suggest that the section on group processes is the strongest, especially since the authors draw on some of my work. But, I won't do that. The overall volume is balanced and well constructed. One section leads into another and builds on the foundation preceding it.

If you want a sound and solid overview of family education, get this volume.

## Remembering well: rituals for celebrating life and mourning death

(2000) by Sarah York. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers, hardback, \$20.

From the beginning of time, peoples and animals have marked with rites and rituals the deaths of family and friends. More recently, a renewed interest in rituals has been shown.

Examples include the wide-spread practice of roadside markers where road deaths have occurred; the overwhelming outpouring of flowers and notes after the death of Princess Diana; and after the September 11th tragedy.

Rituals, as collective and symbolic acts, can aid the grieving processes. Those working with families, even those who don't think of themselves as grief resources, need to be ready to respond to questions and statements about rituals. Sarah York's book can be a valuable resource. While addressing death rituals, York displays a keen sensitivity to the importance of story-telling, to balancing painful and positive aspects of persons, and to the inclusion of a wide circle of caring. Readers will be able to adapt much of what is said in *Remembering Well* to other disruptive changes. Further, her Unitarian background invites readers of many traditions to consider the wisdom she offers.

Sections of the book include themes like the following: composing a service; when a family is alienated; the seasons of grief; and a resource section. Given this breadth and the depth of sensitivity York displays, the book will be a valuable resource for many.