

Pre Boston

Family Newsletter – February 2022

Monthly News from Boston Universal Pre-K for Parents and Caregivers

Dear Boston UPK Parents & Caregivers,

Hope the New Year is off to a good start for you and your family. February is upon us, dubbed Black History Month. This annual tradition helps us to recognize the central role of African Americans in U.S. history, while highlighting their many achievements. In the context of this celebration, we have an opportunity to further explore American history with our kids. Please also check out Abby's Corner for an article about race in this month's newsletter.

As February rolls around, we get to Valentine's Day. If this is a tradition in your family or at your center, I hope your kid(s) can participate in fun activities that highlight the importance of love, family & friendships.

Here are some highlights in this month's Family Newsletter:

- An update from the Early Childhood Family Council (ECFC) Steering Committee
- The first article in a series on self regulation from Liz Muscolino, the new UPK Behavioral Health Services Liaison
- Abby's Corner
- Speech and Occupational Therapy (SPOT) Corner
- Information on two upcoming Power of Parenting program cohorts, sponsored by Boston UPK partner Families First, and an article from Dr. Maureen O'Brien on the potential impact this program can leave on your family

Other points I want to bring to your attention:

Please continue to support your child at home with the recommended readings and activities found in the curriculum home links: [Unit 3](#) & [Unit 4](#).

If your child needs to isolate or quarantine at home, please ask your program for a remote learning contingency kit.

BPS Kindergarten (K2) registration will start on February 7. Please reach out to your program's Family Engagement Coordinator (FEC) for assistance.

Should you have any questions or concerns, please reach out to the FEC at your program, the Early Childhood Family Council Steering Committee, or contact me directly.

Stay safe and healthy!

Joelle Auguste

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Events and Announcements

Power of Parenting Program

Boston UPK partner Families First will offer two upcoming cohorts of the Power of Parenting program (in English). This program is free.

Cohort 1: Power of Parenting for parents/caregivers of children **ages 0-3**. This group meets on Thursdays, beginning March 17 from 10:30-11:45 AM; optional information session on March 10 at 10:30 AM.

Cohort 2: Power of Parenting for parents/caregivers of children **ages 3-8**. This group meets on Tuesdays, beginning March 15 from 6:15-7:30 PM; optional information session March 8 at 6:15 PM.

Parents & caregivers can register [here](#). Find details in a flyer [here](#).

Kindergarten Registration

Registration for kindergarten (K2) in Boston Public Schools begins February 7. Families of UPK students at community providers are eligible for a Connector System which gives them a higher chance in the lottery for K2 in certain BPS schools. In order to be eligible for the Connector, caregivers must register their child during the BPS priority registration period from February 7-April 1. More information on the timeline for registering for K2 in BPS can be found at www.bostonpublicschools.org/register.

Abby's Corner

Grace, Knowledge, and Power

Supporting Young Children's Understanding of Race

February is designated in schools as Black History Month, but children's experiences and understanding of race is daily. Children begin to form their ideas, feelings, and even biases towards race as early as toddler-age and younger. How can families address these issues and support children to develop positive self-identities and inclusive dispositions towards others?

Grace: The first step in unpacking these issues with children is reflecting on our **own** experiences with racial and cultural identities. For many people of color, that can mean confronting pain, as well as carrying pride. As with many issues, it's not necessary that we show children that we have the answer, but more importantly, that we are grappling with the questions. Share your stories with children, especially ones from when you were their age – young children are always in awe that you ever were their age! Young children may not necessarily understand all of the nuance of your stories, but they will pick up on your emotions and feelings associated with them. Be open to showing your vulnerabilities, but also highlight events that were positively impactful, along with people who were heroes, role models, and allies.

Knowledge: Young children are perpetually trying to make sense of the world around them, including what race and culture mean to them and their families. More often than not, our role in developing children's understanding of complex issues, is to "fill in the blanks" – young children may say or act in ways that seem biased or excluding of others, not out of malice, but simply out of limited knowledge. For example, children who have classroom experiences studying how shades of skin color are both different **and** similar are less likely to associate skin color with being "good" or "bad." We can best support children by normalizing conversations about race and welcoming *any* questions or noticing that they express. Be prepared to respond calmly (and with genuine curiosity) to uncomfortable situations ex., responding to a child's "awkward" question/noticing about a person unlike them with "what makes you think that?" or "hmm, let's find out more about that together."

Power: Whatever path we take to support children to develop their understanding of race and culture, we all share a common goal – to develop self-aware, empathetic, and engaged members of our society. Listening to children's questions, supporting them as they navigate the unavoidable complications, and giving them safe spaces to make mistakes bestows upon them the ultimate power – of being active agents in making and *being* the change for a better future for us all.

For more information, please read [Talking to Very Young Children About Race](#).

Abby Morales

Program Director, BPS Department of Early Childhood

Know That You Are Not Alone

By Maureen O'Brien, PhD, Director at Families First



If someone approached you and said, “Hey, why don’t you sign up for this parenting workshop series in your neighborhood?” - what do you think you might say? With all of the stressors going on in the world, perhaps your response might be, “Why would any parent want to sign up for one more thing right now?” Well, it turns out there are several reasons why. According to parents who have enrolled in our **Power of Parenting** program, there is a shared sense of community that happens when you meet with other parents weekly – yes, even on Zoom – to discuss typical behaviors of young children. And there are lots of strategies and tips offered that can lessen the stress of parenting. One mother of a preschooler noted: *“I became more confident. I really learned that I am not alone. There are parents in the same situation and we just need the opportunity to come together to get support from each other. We all have so much to give.”*

The idea behind parenting education is to build on parents’ own strengths so that they feel more confident and competent in the ways they care for their children. In fact, parenting education and support has a long history, going back to the 1800s. In the last 75 years, parenting groups and formal programs have become much more popular in the USA. And research shows that parents who are well supported have children who have more positive outcomes in lots of ways – higher self-esteem, better relationships with others, and stronger academic outcomes. These are all desirable outcomes, yes?

Yet there is sometimes the impression that only parents who are struggling mightily can benefit from parenting workshops. Nothing is further from the truth: ALL parents benefit from the knowledge, skills and support systems that parenting groups create. After all, parenting is a lifelong commitment and a very challenging job. And there are a wide variety of beliefs – some cultural, some based on how each of us was raised – that can be drawn from. What IS universal is that the parent-child relationship has incredible influence on how children grow and thrive. From keeping our children’s basic needs met to nurturing their emotional needs to building their problem-solving skills, there’s nothing that parents don’t feel responsible for. And sometimes that responsibility can feel overwhelming, so it helps to have a connection with other parents sharing that same experience!

That’s where a parenting workshop model like ours can be part of the solution. Our parent graduates tell us that the folks who run the workshops make them feel valued, respected and heard. They learn tried and true strategies, like positive discipline and promoting independence, that benefit the entire family. They discover resources in their community that they didn’t know existed. And many build relationships with other families that last long after the program concludes. One mom told us: *“I’ve learned to be patient and not go crazy when I get bombarded with multiple kids and multiple problems at once. I’m not perfect, but I have the tools to get better every day.”*

This year there has been a constant drumbeat of stressful news. As parents we worry about our children growing up in an environment that feels threatening too much of the time. So one potential way to share these concerns and feel united and stronger together might be to see what parenting supports and programs exist that appeal to you. One silver lining of this past year is that most of these programs are now offered online, so you could participate right from home. Think about it, maybe ask a friend or family member to join you, and start building your parenting support system now. I don’t think you’ll regret it.

There are two cohorts of the Power of Parenting program beginning in March 2022. The program is free to parents and caregivers of UPK students. You can sign up [here](#).

Self-Regulation Series, Part 1

By Liz Muscolino, M.Ed., EdS

UPK Behavioral Health Services Liaison

What Is Self-Regulation?

Have you ever been tempted to do something you weren't supposed to do but you were able to distract yourself and get away from temptation (like eating that extra cookie)? Have you ever found yourself very frustrated when talking to a family member or a co-worker, but were still able to finish the conversation and move on without the situation escalating? If you said "yes," it means that you have self-regulation skills. Self-regulation skills help us manage behavior, thoughts, emotions, and energy levels in order to reach our group or individual goals.

Why Is Self-Regulation Important?

Self-regulation skills are considered essential - adults and children use these skills to cope with strong feelings, focus our attention, and work with others toward a common goal. Supporting children in developing strong self-regulation skills will help them be successful in school and in life! Children need to be taught self-regulation skills by adults and need to practice these skills over and over again.

Watch this 5-minute [video](#) with Sesame Street's Cookie Monster and the host of National Public Radio's Life Kit Parenting Podcast to get a better understanding of what self-regulation is and how it might look for younger children.

Coming next month: Self-Regulation Games

This is the first in a series! Look out for the following segment in next month's newsletter to learn more about fun games that teach self-regulation skills.

Liz Muscolino recently joined Boston Universal Pre-K as the Behavioral Health Services Liaison. Learn more about Liz below.

My name is Liz Muscolino and I am in my 10th year as a school psychologist and my 3rd year in Boston Public Schools. I have worked with a variety of special populations, age groups, and family configurations. I have worked in public schools, private schools, and in homes. I was a teaching assistant at an Early Intervention center for several years before acquiring my degree. I earned my master's of education in school psychology at UMass Boston. My husband and I welcomed our first child in March of 2021 and we love living in the community we serve. My current hobbies include hanging out with my family, eating too many dumplings, and playing pickup ultimate frisbee. I am humbled and honored to be a part of the UPK team. I am excited to meet and collaborate with the UPK teachers, students, and families!



SPOT (Speech & Occupational Therapy) Corner

Jennifer Montrose, Speech and Language Pathologist

Cassandra Crichlow, Occupational Therapist

Each month, the UPK Related Services team will be sharing takeaway notes from presentations to teachers. This month focuses on characteristics of English Language Learners (ELL).

Boston is a very diverse city of people representing many different cultures. This beautiful mix of differences means that some of our children hear many languages or may be learning English for the first time as they enter school. Knowing this, it's good to have some understanding of how children present in the classroom as they are learning a new language, all while learning the routine of the classroom. Knowing this information may help decrease the number of children who are learning English from being mislabeled with a communication disorder. There are five stages in the learning of a second language; however, given that our UPK children are young we will focus on the first 3 stages. Please note, the months/years timeline refers to the time exposed to the second language and **not** the age of the child.

Stage	Characteristics students show
Silent & Receptive (0 - 6 months)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Often hesitant, unsure or verbally unresponsive• May use one word responses• Respond non-verbally (pointing, nodding, gesturing or drawing)• Are developing listening skills• Need time to be comfortable in the classroom environment, procedures and activities
Early Production (6 months - 1 year)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Relate words to their environment• Begin to grasp the main idea of messages• Begin to focus on contextual clues• Use routine expression independently• Mispronounce words• Demonstrate improved comprehension• Will use 1 or 2 word responses, advancing to 2 or 3 words• May not tell you if they understand• Will repeat memorable language
Speech Emergence (1 - 3 years)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Begin to speak in simple sentences• Demonstrate increased vocabulary• Show improved comprehension• May ask for clarification or meaning• Participate in small group discussion, may rely on native language (L1) to communicate complex ideas• Start to acquire basic communication skills and social language

- The stages are a **normal part of learning a second language** and are **not** indicative of a communication disorder.
- Children learning English for the first time **need time and exposure to the language** to learn.
- Your child will receive exposure to English at school; **please continue to use your home language with your child** to help keep their first language intact.
- In BPS, English language learner (ELL) services begin at 5 years old.
- Speech Therapists work on communication disorders and **not** English language acquisition.

Update from the Early Childhood Family Council

The Early Childhood Family Council (ECFC) has been hard at work this year. The full council met in January to receive updates and provide feedback on the development of a curriculum for three-year-olds and the revision of the UPK cost model. Jeri Robinson, Chair of the Boston School Committee, was a special guest at the meeting. She emphasized the importance of nurturing deep connections between families and schools, reinforcing the value of the ECFC and the involvement of all families who benefit from UPK and BPS.

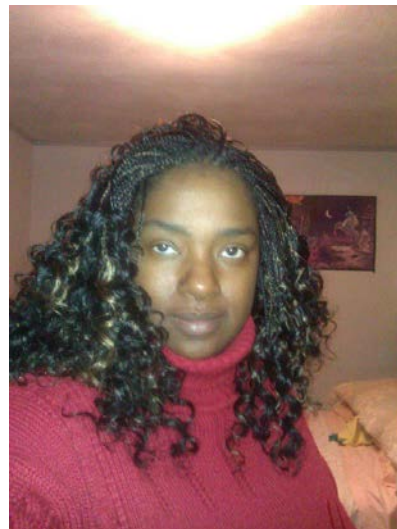
If you would like to be connected with the ECFC representative from your student's UPK Program, please contact ecfcsteeringcommittee@gmail.com. Please include the center/program your child attends along with your questions or comments.

Meet the Steering Committee

This month, we are introducing you to two more members of the Steering Committee of the Early Childhood Family Council.

Sangrine James, Vice Chair

My name is Sangrine James and my granddaughter goes to Nurtury Learning Lab in Jamaica Plain. I love the program because the staff is very caring, has good relationships with youth and family, and it has a healthy learning environment. I have had two other grandchildren go through this program with great success and I was a part of the parent committee until COVID shut it down. My reason for wanting to be involved in the ECFC Steering Committee is to ensure that the program continues to grow so that all children and families will continue to experience what I have. I was a former preschool teacher at Nurtury Learning Lab so I got to be a part of the ins and outs of the center, the learning and teaching styles, and how hard staff work to make sure the children have a safe and healthy learning environment.



Sarah Olia, Co-chair

I'm Sarah Olia, co-chair of the EC Family Council. My son Conrad is a graduate of the UPK classroom at RTH Early Education Center (YMCA) in the Longwood Medical Area. He is now a K2 student at the Curley School in Jamaica Plain. I also have a two-year-old daughter named Siri. My family had such a positive experience with UPK as a bridge for my son between his family daycare and a traditional kindergarten classroom. I look forward to helping others discover this opportunity as well. As a member of the council, I hope that I contribute to building a strong UPK parent community that is supportive, encouraging, and collaborative. I am also very enthusiastic about educating other families about UPK as an option for their children. I've built a career centered on education, inspired by my time as a Peace Corps volunteer in Moldova where I worked as a teacher and teacher trainer in a local school. Currently I work as an assistant director of a graduate program at the Harvard Kennedy School of Government.

