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In The News

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Dr. Harvey Karp Brings ♦Happiest Baby♦ Research to Detroit

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BY JULIE OSBURN

Nationally renowned pediatrician and child development specialist, Harvey Karp, MD, visited Wayne State University on May 15th and 16th to present his novel approach to reducing tantrums and boosting cooperative behaviors in toddlers. In addition to having nearly 30 years experience in private practice, Dr. Karp serves as an assistant professor at the University of Southern California's Keck School of Medicine. He is also the author of three popular parenting books: *The Happiest Baby on the Block*, *The Happiest Toddler on the Block*, and *The Happiest Baby Guide to Great Sleep*. His work centers on helping parents and caregivers experience success early on and contributes to healthier parent-child relational patterns. Parent education training programs that partner with guidance from his books equip parents with strategies to calm colicky and/or fussy babies, boost infant sleep, and reduce tantrums and promote patience in toddlers.



Karp's visit was sponsored by the Woodward Corridor Early Childhood Consortium via a grant from the Kresge Foundation and Merrill Palmer Skillman Institute. His presentations were attended by childcare providers from several Woodward Corridor Early Childhood Consortium member centers. In addition, Wayne State University faculty and students, early childhood educators from local school districts, and members of the community attended the two presentations, held at Merrill Palmer Skillman Institute.

While his presentations largely focused on toddlers, he discussed several strategies to promote trust and a secure bond between parents and infants. In *The Happiest Baby on the Block*, Karp teaches parents the importance of the five S's: swaddling, side/stomach position, shushing, swinging and sucking and demonstrates how proper implementation can calm a crying/fussy baby in minutes by triggering the baby's "calming reflex." During the toddler years, he instructs parents on how to reduce the number and duration of tantrums by speaking to them in a language and tone they can understand. According to Harp, when toddlers are upset they emphasize "right brain thinking" and benefit more from empathy than from facts. He cautions parents not to treat the child as a mini-adult and attempt to talk him/her through the situation. Rather, he suggests parents use short phrases, repetition and a level of emotion that mimics about 30% of the child's emotion. Workshop attendees viewed several excerpts from *The Happiest Toddler on the Block* DVD in order to see the strategies in action.

College of Education assistant professor Erika Bocknek, Ph.D., has been working with Dr. Karp to establish research projects at Wayne State University and in the Detroit community. While the parenting program for *The Happiest Baby on the Block* is well-established, there has been no evaluation of the parenting program associated with *The Happiest Toddler on the Block*. Karp is excited to partner with Bocknek and Wayne State to establish a research base for this work here in Detroit. According to Bocknek, "toddlerhood

is an exciting time of development, but it can present challenges for families and teachers. *The Happiest Toddler on the Block* is unique in that it teaches communication skills to adults who parent, teach and provide care to toddlers. Detroit is the perfect place to evaluate this program given our existing leadership in infant mental health scholarship and practice.”

Read more about Dr. Bocknek’s research in the Research section of this newsletter. For more information, please contact her at Erika.Bocknek@wayne.edu.

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