



EXCHANGE FAMILY CENTER

Supporting Children Together, since 1992

EFC AT A GLANCE

**In fiscal year 2018-2019,
EFC served nearly
2000 individuals.**

Our Programs:

- Family Support Program (FSP)
- Early Childhood Outreach (EChO)
- Parenting of Adolescents (POA) Program

**"I'm very confident
in my parenting now.
I definitely feel that."**

— Amy, single mom,
EFC client

EFC provides 'invaluable' support for single, stay-at-home Durham mom

"Parenting isn't easy," says Amy, a single, stay-at-home mom in Durham. "It's a lot."

Based on her hospital's recommendation, Amy, whose son Kenny is now five, came to Exchange Family Center (EFC) as a new parent. EFC has supported Durham families free of charge since 1992 with a range of evidence-based services for families with kids of all ages.

Conflicting messages about parenting

Without a lot of "mom friends," Amy was on her own during the day for Kenny's first two years. In addition, she was getting lots of advice from family that made her unsure of her own instincts. She began to ask herself: "Am I being too clingy, too smothering?"

Leah Parrish Santibañez, LCSW, points out that EFC's social workers hear this "all the time. Parents want to pick up their baby, but someone told them not to." Both women spoke to the common myth that a baby will be spoiled if a parent holds them too much. Santibañez says these messages "go against our natural instincts and muddy the waters of how we should parent."

"I knew instinctually that that's what I'm supposed to be doing," says Amy. It "really helped" when Santibañez said: "That's not a problem, you're building a secure attachment." Amy goes on, "so I did do a lot of holding, and being really attentive, and I think it paid off in the long run because he's grown to be such a confident, happy, intelligent child."



'A good start'

It's easy to put a kid in front of the TV or a screen "to keep them quiet when you have stuff to do," Amy says. But one of her highest priorities was to "give my son a good start." Amy loved reading to Kenny regularly, and even more when her social worker encouraged her. "I did a lot of paying attention also," Amy says, "I focused on him a lot and was down there playing with him."

Time together, playing together, builds crucial bonds. For example, EFC teaches parents to "follow the lead' of the child," Santibañez says. "It's entering the child's world, what are they imagining this play time is about? Don't try to correct them, or make them do it the right way, just follow along and see where it takes you."

"It was scary. I was stressed out; he was stressed out; I was exhausted and alone. It was the scariest moment in parenting for me—knowing that everything I usually did wasn't working."

— Amy, single mom, EFC client

"Having this program," Amy says, "gave me the confidence in what I'm doing. I'm fostering his love of learning and imagination and that really made a difference." Kenny started reading at 3, Amy says, "and now he's reading the books I'm reading."

"Bringing information is important" says Santibañez, but even more, "we're building confidence, letting parents know 'you can do this!'"

Preventing child abuse

The information and confidence Amy gained from EFC played a critical role in helping her manage the stress of being a new mom and not always knowing how to deal with her newborn's sometimes seemingly inconsolable crying.

"It was scary. I was stressed out; he was stressed out; I was exhausted and alone. It was the scariest moment in parenting for me—knowing that everything I usually did wasn't working. But the family therapist had taught me tips and tricks to de-stress and de-escalate the situation. First, make sure he's safe, like in his crib. Then, if you take a couple of minutes for yourself, to regroup, and clear your head, you're not going to get worked up and potentially shake him or do something to hurt him."

“Abuse happens for lots of reasons, but one is lack of support, not knowing what to do. For those that don’t have those supports, that’s where EFC comes in.”

– Leah Parrish Santibañez, LCSW,
EFC family therapist

EFC AT A GLANCE

In fiscal year 2018-2019:

- 103 families served in our FSP program.
- 61 children served in our EChO program.
- 36 families with adolescents served in our POA program.

ALL OUR PROGRAMS had a 91% success rate or higher.

“You wouldn’t believe you could let yourself get to that point,” Amy says, “but it really can happen. So giving parents techniques and strategies to work through that, that was invaluable, it really was.”

Indeed, major studies demonstrate the relationship between Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) and a variety of negative outcomes in adulthood, such as poor physical and mental health, substance abuse, and risky behavior. The stakes are high and support can mean the difference between success or a downward spiral.

“Abuse happens for lots of reasons, but one is lack of support,” Santibañez says, “not knowing what to do.” Some parents, though, have built-in support like friends or family. “For those that don’t have those supports, that’s where EFC comes in. Every parent gets help in one way or another. It’s nothing to be ashamed of.”

Amy has clearly reaped the benefits of EFC’s support. “I feel like I’m very confident in my parenting now. I definitely feel that and I was able to learn and to grow as a parent—I have done right by my son.”



About Exchange Family Center:

EFC helps keep children safe and families together. We have been involved in the Durham community for over 27 years, helping families and preventing child abuse and neglect.

EFC is a registered 501(c)3 nonprofit organization