Strong Couples—Strong Children is a new program that supports couples, helping them to stay together and strengthen their relationships with each other and their children.

The transition to parenthood can be an exciting and yet, daunting experience for young unmarried, expectant couples. Meeting the needs of a new baby and maintaining a partnership can be hard work. Over the past year, our new program, Strong Couples—Strong Children (SC—SC) has helped many expectant couples in Durham handle the numerous challenges that come with having children.

Strong Couples—Strong Children aims to strengthen relationships among expectant couples and new parents by providing them with the tools needed for effective communication, problem-solving, stress and conflict management. These relationship skills are offered in group settings using the curriculum, "Love's Cradle."

Couples also receive family care support services to reinforce communication skills and to connect them to community resources such as job training, Medicaid and childcare. The program also has a fatherhood care coordinator. He works with the fathers around employment and other practical and personal issues.

Couples completing the program receive up to $200 in gift cards. As they progress, participants also receive small gift items that serve as reminders or reflections of the skills and concepts that have been covered. In addition, meals, childcare and transportation assistance are provided for every Love's Cradle session.

“We loved that this came along to help us through some troubling times. We are learning better ways to communicate and that we need to stick together in order to better understand each other.”

“We want our couples to think of this as a ‘date night’ where they can just enjoy themselves, focus on their relationship and not have to worry about things such as cooking dinner” said Dr. Jones, program director.

Strong Couples—Strong Children, which just completed its first year of offering services, is making lasting changes in couples’ lives. They have begun to build a strong foundation for their future together as a couple and a family.

If you are interested in participating in the STRONG COUPLES—STRONG CHILDREN program, please call (919) 560-7624 for more information.

“It is invigorating to watch the young couples so motivated to change their lifestyles. Like most of us, these couples learned to communicate and have a relationship based upon observation and conversations with family, friends, media and other personal sources. Sometimes these skills are not working so oftentimes they have to work together to break some habits and patterns from the past. I am proud to say that our participants are really learning and using new skills and sharing with each other more positively. Our couples work hard and we celebrate their growth.”

—Program Manager Erline Harvin
On Sept. 12, 2008 Rasheeda Statford and Calvin Burton were married. The couple completed 10 weeks of skill-building sessions with SC—SC prior to their wedding. Rasheeda and Calvin wanted to improve their communication, problem solving and conflict management skills to strengthen their relationship and found that SC—SC gave them the tools they needed to accomplish this goal.

Learning how to “listen to one another,” was the most influential part of the program, the couple agreed. “The program really works,” Calvin said. “I would say to anyone, don’t knock the program before you try it because it really works!”

He and his wife now feel a stronger connection to one another and have found ways to accept their differences, Calvin added. “Essentially, our children benefit from the skills learned from the weekly sessions,” he said.

Rasheeda said she also found the program enlightening. “It was helpful to meet other people with similar issues in their relationship. We were able to help one another.”

Like Rasheeda and Calvin, all of the SC—SC couples are committed to building stronger relationships with each other and their children. Whether the goal is to stay together or get married, Strong Couples—Strong Children helps couples strengthen the foundation for a healthy relationship.

Is STRONG COUPLES—STRONG CHILDREN RIGHT FOR YOU?

- Do you live in Durham County?
- Are you unmarried and pregnant or have a baby 3 months old or younger?
- Are you 18 or older?
- Are you looking for ways to strengthen your relationship with your partner?

AND DO YOU WANT?
- A close, happy relationship with your partner?
- Help with practical needs like job training and childcare?
- The best for your child?

If you answered yes to all of the above, SC—SC may be right for you. It is a free program in Durham County with three core components:

- Relationship skill sessions
- Family care coordination services
- Fatherhood support services

Assistance with transportation, food and childcare services are provided free of charge.

Message from the Program Director

The Strong Couples—Strong Children program is a dream come true for me! I have worked with couples and families for many years and have seen the difference that strong couple and co-parenting relationships can make for children. This first issue of the SC—SC newsletter coincides with the 1 year anniversary of the completion of our first two groups of couples. I hope to expand this program and make a difference in the lives of new parents and their children. I want to thank our partnership organizations, the Durham County Public Health Department and Cooperative Extension Service, our wonderful staff and our many other partnering organizations for their enthusiastic support and many contributions.

Dr. Anne Jones

Couples Corner

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For more information or to join the Strong Couples—Strong Children program, contact Erline Harvin (919) 560-7624 or Alicia Nelson (919) 560-7859 (Español)

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Congratulations to Strong Couples—Strong Children’s July 16th group!

The couples’ last session was held on September 23, 2008. Participants received gifts and certificates of completion. “This feels like the last day of school,” joked one participant. Laughs and hugs were exchanged as couples held their certificates and posed for photos. Group members swapped personal contact information with plans to stay in touch.

Let’s Celebrate!

Congratulations to Latoya and Jordy! The couple gave birth to their baby girl on Oct.11, 2008.

Congratulations to Christina and Marcos who became the proud parents of a baby girl.

Congratulations to Andrea who is returning to school in the spring! She and Marcus are moving to Florida and are planning to marry next year.

Congratulations to Vondeara and Donte on their new job!

Congratulations to Dontè and Adrienne who recently got engaged!

Congratulations to Calvin and Rasheeda. The couple was married on Sept.12, 2008, at their church, Apostolic Revival.

We congratulate all of the couples for their hard work and dedication to each other and their children. We wish you much success in your future!

“Let’s Celebrate!”

This program was very helpful. Not only do my partner and I communicate better, but now he understands that he can play a larger role within the family. He knows that it is helpful when he shares in the household duties like cooking, cleaning and helping me with the baby. It has helped him let go of some of the machista ideas he had before.” —Claudia

Special Thanks!

Strong Couples—Strong Children would like to thank all of our couples for their participation in the program. We wish each of you success and happiness as you continue to strengthen your family.

Next Sessions

We are approaching a new year and recruitment is underway for Spanish and English speaking groups. On Jan. 28, 2009, we will host our first English, Spanish or multilingual group of the New Year. If you or someone you know is interested, contact Project Manager Erline Harvin at (919) 560-7624. You may also visit our Web site at www.strongcouples.org

Upcoming Events

November Informational Social
When: November 19, 2008
Where: Durham County Cooperative Extension Service
721 Foster Street, Durham, NC 27701
Time: 6:30pm – 8pm
Come out to learn and enroll in our program
Light refreshments will be served!

For additional information, contact Charessa Sawyer at (919) 560-7624.

Look for the Strong Couples—Strong Children TV commercial on Time Warner Cable and radio broadcast on K.97.5 and the Spanish radio station La Ley!

Sponsor recognition
Thank you to
AMF Bowling
Carolina Theater in Durham
Chick-fil-A
Durham’s Partnership for Children
LOCO Pops Ice Cream
Stadium 10 at Northgate
Texas Roadhouse
The Chicken Hut
Your generous contributions to the SC—SC families are appreciated.

Strong Couples—Strong Children is a partnership program of the School of Social Work at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill; Durham County Health Department; Durham County Cooperative Extension Service and UNC’s Jordan Institute for Families.
1. **Appreciate yourself and your partner**: Take time to understand just what it is that you like about yourself and your partner. Acknowledge the little things. If your partner opens the door for you, gives you a glass of water or listens to you, appreciate that by positively acknowledging it...

2. **Listen**: Listen to your partner. Practice by saying, “Wow, I can see you are frustrated,” or “That must have been hard on you.” Let your partner know you’re hearing them.

3. **Tell the truth**: Sharing your true feelings and speaking from your experience is a great way to connect with your partner. If you are hiding something in your relationship, you will not feel connected. So consider making honesty an ongoing priority in your life.

4. **Have Fun!**: Engage in hobbies together. Find other things to do that you both will enjoy together. Write your partner love notes and give them cards for no reason. As cheesy as it may sound, it is effective. Just think how special you felt the last time you received a card; your partner likely feels the same way. You’ll bond.

5. **Admit your mistakes and say “I’m sorry”** / **Forgive one another**: Forgiveness is an act of letting go of the past and a perceived wrong. It’s about taking control of your current situation and moving forward. Be willing to talk about issues or problems and try to reach a mutual agreement on how to handle future situations and commit to it. Respect your partner and give them space when they ask for it. After a misunderstanding or argument, give each other time to think about the right and wrong things that were said and done. Such efforts will make your relationship stronger and help improve communication between you and your partner.

Bonus Tip! Show your partner LOVE and RESPECT. Pay attention and make an effort to look your partner in the eyes when they are talking to you. Show them that you are listening. Be trustworthy and accept, respect and cherish your similarities and differences. Most importantly, don’t forget to say, “I love you.”

For more tips please log on to: [http://www.ehow.com](http://www.ehow.com)