

Parenting Classes

Judge Leonard Edwards (ret.), NCJFCJ Past President



NCJFCJ Past Presidents' Corner

Judge Leonard Edwards is retired from the Santa Clara Superior Court and is a past president of the NCJFCJ.

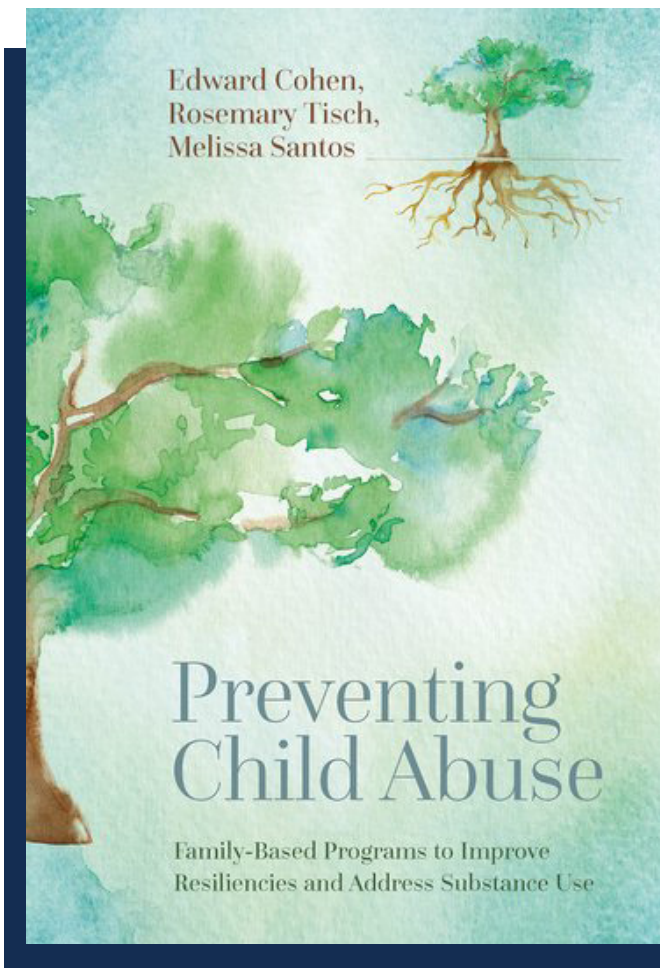
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The first parenting class I visited was in the 1980's when I was the Presiding Judge of the Juvenile Court. It reminded me of a lecture. The parents sat in rows while the teacher (in this case a probation officer) instructed them on good parenting. It was a part of a 10-week program they were court-ordered to complete. The atmosphere in the room was flat.

The second parenting class I visited was about 10 years later. Once again it was a court-ordered class. It was called Celebrating Families. The children were in one room, and the parents were in a separate room. Each group listened to the instructors, and the groups came together for dinner.

The atmosphere was one of excitement and joy. The parents had been separated by court order and had visits with their children, but nothing like this. I believed that this was a class I would order in every case.

Lately, as a retired judge, I read a book by Rosemary Tisch, Edward Cohen, and Melissa Santos entitled Family-Based Programs to Improve Resiliencies and Address Substance Use (2026, Oxford University Press). It confirmed the value of Celebrating Families and of the positive results of parenting classes which included the entire family.



The authors review a remarkable number of family-based programs to improve resiliencies and address substance use. The book revealed that working with the entire family is the focus of scores of programs nation-wide, and these programs confirm that family-based programs can make positive changes in family life.

The lead story is by Judge Katherine Lucero (ret.), former NCJFCJ Board Director, who now presides over the Office of Youth and Community Restoration (OYCR) in California. She describes being raised in a family that was impacted by substance abuse, but survived through Al-Anon, Alateen, and other programs that gave them

strength and support. Her story is an inspiration for every family that is impacted by substance use.

The book continues with a discussion of ACE's – Adverse Childhood Experiences – that impact all of us. The research reveals that negative childhood experiences can have a lasting impact on us, the more adverse experiences, the greater the impact. For example, research indicates that children of parents who use alcohol or drugs are twice as likely to develop substance use issues. One conclusion is that the family can be the source of resilience, and the programs discussed in the book can help the family focus on its strengths.

The book discusses scores of family-based prevention programs from several countries, but primarily from the United States. Some are designed for Hispanic parents, others for Native American Families, still others for Black families, and for Asian families. All are of interest to those of us who work with families impacted by substance use. The book has a separate chapter focusing on evaluating the impact of family-based programs.

I believe that judges need to know whether the programs they order are effective. We want the programs we order to have a positive impact on the families who appear before us. I believe that judges should visit those programs to learn how they are conducted and ask for results. We should know whether our orders make sense, and that they improve the families we preside over.