

New recipe for parenting

Working with kids and her daughter's struggles to learn inspired mom's book.

By Michelle Ma, Star Tribune

When Maureen McKay prepares a meal, she doesn't want to read an entire cookbook. Instead, she wants quick, under-a-minute tips on how to make a dish.

The Minnetonka author and mother understands that many parents today also seek speedy ways of getting information and ideas on how to raise their children. That's why she wrote a book that presents educational and parenting strategies in a new, snappy format.

It's called "Optimistic Outcomes: What Every Parent Wants and Every Child Needs," and it's spiral-bound, stands on end and reads like a collection of cookbook recipes.

The book includes nearly 250 short strategies that focus on parenting, communication in the home and at school, and academic tips.

McKay's innovative approach is getting noticed: the book just received a silver medal award from Independent Publisher in the 2007 parenting book category.

"This book is a great example of something that really broke the rules as far as the format and the presentation, and we loved it for that reason," said Jim Barnes, Independent Publisher Online managing editor and awards director. "It recognizes that people learn in different ways and that maybe the straight book format is not the best for everybody."

McKay took about four years to research and write her book, but she spent years prior to that working with children in classrooms, especially when her now 13-year-old daughter started school.

When her daughter was in second grade, McKay realized she was struggling to learn in a traditional school environment. So she started to do research and talk with educators, learning new techniques that could help her daughter grasp concepts in a way that better fit her learning style. These tips became the basis for the book.



"I realized there was a niche that wasn't being filled," McKay said.

"A lot of what I read and saw in schools would be helpful in homes," she said. "I realized there was a niche that wasn't being filled."

The book is designed to help parents work collaboratively with their children. It reflects a positive way of parenting that McKay is able to easily communicate to other parents, said Becky Lawyer, a career counselor at Hubert H. Humphrey Job Corps Center in St. Paul.

Lawyer worked with McKay at the Learning Disabilities Association-Minnesota, where McKay still facilitates a support group for parents of children who are struggling in school. McKay's creative tips have helped many frustrated families, Lawyer said.

ORDER THE BOOK

"Optimistic Outcomes: What Every Parent Wants and Every Child Needs" by Maureen McKay can be purchased online.

Visit www.optimisticoutcomes.com or www.amazon.com.

Specific suggestions in her book have catchy names like "Examine Exams" and "Slinging Slang." Parents can search the index by topic -- such as "positive thinking," "parent-teacher conferences" and "noise" -- and get directed to tips that relate to those issues.

Each strategy includes a small symbol that denotes whether the tip is more geared toward auditory, visual or kinesthetic ways of learning. This categorization can be important for parents in finding the most effective ways of relating to their children, McKay said. One goal of the book is to help parents identify which is the most effective method of getting through to their children.

As McKay gains experience working with junior high and high school students, she plans to publish an edition for parenting that age group as well. She also wants to offer an e-book option for the current book.

And as her company continues to grow, McKay has started speaking to PTAs and other parent groups.

In the meantime, the current edition of her book continues to win accolades for McKay and her company, Optimistic Outcomes LLC. In June, the company was named one of 30 semifinalists in the 2007 Minnesota Cup, a competition sponsored by the University of Minnesota and Wells Fargo to spotlight new, innovative business ideas. It was among more than 500 entrants.