



Tribune/Barry Kough

Lesley Perrigo, who is attending free parenting classes in Clarkston, poses with her children, Alexis, 3, and Haylee, 1.

Training for a tough job

Free classes in Clarkston offer tips to people of all ages who want to learn child-care skills

By **KERRI SANDAINE**
OF THE TRIBUNE

Kids may not come with instructions, but Lesley Perrigo said she's getting some pretty good tips on how to deal with them.

The 23-year-old mother of two is attending free parenting classes coordinated through Asotin County Community Services. She said the sessions have given her a new perspective on raising Alexis, 3, and Haylee, 1.

"It's helped me a lot with my parenting skills and it's helped me understand my kids better," Perrigo said. "I meet other parents, get new ideas and it helps me become a better mother."

The focus is on reducing power struggles, age-appropriate ways to handle behavior issues, and nurturing



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CARRIE GURGEL,
PREVENTION SPECIALIST

kids.

"I've learned how to handle my children without spanking them, and I've learned different ways to discipline them," she said. "I give them choices. I cancel a fun activity instead of spanking or using a time out."

The parenting classes are on Tuesday nights in Clarkston at 1431 Fair St., near Walla Walla Community College. Registration takes place throughout the year, and the next session begins in early November.

"Our goal is to help parents show love, set limits and meet basic needs,"

said Carrie Gurgel, a prevention specialist who has been teaching the classes for about 10 years.

"I think parents are the most important and influential people in their child's life. It's a tough job. I appreciate parents who come to class and share what works for them."

The classes are funded by the state Division of Alcohol and Substance Abuse, and a free dinner and childcare are provided. Sign-up information is available by calling Gurgel at 509-758-3181.

"A wide variety of people attend the classes," Gurgel said. "We've had everyone from grandparents to really young people who want to learn child-care skills."

Perrigo said as a single mom, it's nice to have other adults to talk to about parenting issues. The classes will also help in her pursuit of owning a day care someday.

She said she places a high value on

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her role as a parent and is thankful for her children. "Being a mother is a wonderful feeling," Perrigo said. "My kids brighten my day. They bring joy to my life."

She and her girls are currently living in Lewiston as residents of Family Promise, a nonprofit organization that provides food, shelter and assistance to families in crisis. They spend the day at the Family Promise Day Center and nights at various

churches in the community.

Perrigo had been staying with relatives and friends when she found out about Family Promise. "I think the program is great," she said. "Right now, I'm going back to school to get my GED, and I'm trying to find a job and housing."

She and the girls' father, Andrew Davis, met in high school. They broke up after a five-year relationship, and he shares custody of the kids, Perrigo said.

Alexis likes Disney movies and

reading books. She's learning her ABCs and to count to 10 in English and Spanish, and Haylee likes to be in the middle of whatever her older sister is doing, Perrigo said.

The little girls are well behaved, said Joni Rowe, who is also staying at Family Promise.

"What's cool is Lesley is already a great mom," Rowe said. "She just wants to be even better."

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