

Building Nurturing Interactions in Families Experiencing Parent-Adolescent Conflict:

Validation of the Nurturing Parenting Program for Parents and Adolescents

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Introduction

In the fall of 1986, a three-year extensive research project was undertaken designed to assess and reduce parent-adolescent conflict in families referred for services for family dysfunction. Families reported to Departments of Social Services for adolescent abuse and/or neglect; families with adolescents identified by the courts as delinquent, or wards of the state; and families seeking services to reduce perceived parent-adolescent conflict, participated in the study. The purpose of the study was two-fold:

1. To develop an effective family-based intervention program designed to reduce parent-adolescent conflict by building nurturing family interaction patterns.
2. To assess the impact of the intervention in reducing parent-adolescent conflict

Four validated parenting constructs of abusive parents (Bavolek, 1978) established in earlier research by this author formed the basis of the intervention.

1. Inappropriate parental expectations of children.
2. Lack of empathy toward the needs of children.
3. Belief in the use of corporal punishment.
4. Reversing parent-adolescent family roles.

Methodology

Development of Prototype I

Activities were developed from the goals of the intervention which formed Prototype I of the program. Activities were sequenced in a logical order which maximized the potential for learning. Programs were developed for parents and adolescents to meet concurrently for three hours, one day a week for 16 consecutive weeks. Parents and teens would attend separate groups for the first 70 minutes, followed by a 20 minute snack time. After snack, parents and adolescents would participate jointly in one large group. Discussion, role play, audio-visual programs, creative and dramatic play, and art were means by which the information was presented. The following schedule of activities was employed each program session:

1. Icebreaker and Check-In (20 minutes). Open-ended statements designed to increase self-awareness and empathy, and build group cohesion. An opportunity for participants to share their successes and failures in trying out new concepts and skills. Also, participants are asked to share family or individual experiences and changes which occurred since the last meeting.
2. Concept Presentation (50 minutes). A concept is presented and discussed as a group. Parents and adolescents participate in separate groups.
3. Snack Time (20 minutes). Twenty minutes of free time with a snack and beverage provided by the agency, facilitators, and/or participants.
4. Concept Presentation (80 minutes). Parents and adolescents meet together in the same room to discuss issues, share ideas, perceptions and feelings, and learn new skills. Some weeks parents and adolescents view an A/V presentation before the discussion.
5. Visualization (5 minutes). Nine sessions include visualizations recorded on cassette tape. The visualization is a brief relaxing exercise to increase positive feelings about self and family.

6. Home Practice and Hug (5 minutes). Parents and adolescents are given their individual and family home practice exercises. The session ends with everyone participating in a large group hug.

Selection of the Field Test Sites

Written and verbal requests were sent to agencies throughout the country interested in participating in the research. Agencies who had been using nurturing programs for parents and younger children were contacted as well as departments of mental health, social services, and private non-profits. The requirements for participation were: a) implement the program as designed; b) gather pretest and posttest data from the families; c) completion of weekly process evaluation questionnaires by the program facilitators; and, d) identify and record changes made in the delivery of the service and/or content of the program. A total of 15 sites throughout the country agreed to participate in field testing the program. The following agencies contributed time and staff to the research:

Charlotte County DSS
Carolyn M. Baker
Charlotte, VA

Cabinet for Human Resources DFS
Carolyn Hummell
Louisville, KY

Alaska Youth & Parent Foundation
Nancy Hopperstad
Anchorage, AK

Department of Health & Welfare
Bob Bratcher
Boise, ID

WY Division of Public Assistance & Social Services
Robert T. Landes
Cheyenne, WY

Department for Social Services
Norman O'Neal
Franklin, KY

Parents Anonymous
Becky Kessler
Franklin, KY

Manitowoc County DSS
Shelly Burger
Manitowoc, WI

Walker's Point Youth & Family Center
Fran Kaplan
Milwaukee, WI

Department for Social Services
Donna Dobo
Winchester, KY

Valley West Social Services
Louise Elliot
Kearns, UT

Schoolcraft County Mental Health Clinic
Marian Graff
Manistique, MI

DPASS
Betty Gage
Rock Springs, WY

Weber-Morgan Social Services
Joan Henninger
Ogden, UT

Parents Anonymous of Maryland
Elaine Fisher
Baltimore, MD

Children's Aid Society of Halifax
Mark A. Dalebroux
Halifax, Nova Scotia

Field Testing of Prototype I

Families recruited for participation in the program were asked to make a commitment to attend all 16 program sessions. Pretest and posttest data were gathered in each of the field sites. Comments were generated from agency staff recommending changes to the activities, content, or program requirements.

Development and Field Testing of Prototype II

Based on the pre and posttest data and facilitator evaluations and comments, the 16-week program was modified to a 12-week program. Activities and content were condensed. The 12-week program was sent to the agencies for field testing and implementation. Additional families were recruited for their involvement in the 12-week program. Once again, facilitators were asked to complete required evaluation forms.

Development of Prototype III

Prototype III of the program was developed from the information generated from the field testing of Prototype II. Evaluation comments from the facilitators and participants, along with the pretest and posttest data indicated minor revisions to Prototype II.

Pretest and Posttest Assessment

A battery of inventories were developed for parents and adolescents to complete. Parents and adolescents completed the identical forms with the exception of the personality inventory. Parents completed the 16PF and adolescents completed the High School Personality Questionnaire (HSPQ). The inventories are presented and described in Table 1. Parents and teens were administered the inventories during the first weekly session. Due to the length of the personality inventories, parents and teens were asked to complete the forms at home and bring them in at the second session.

Results

Population Demographics

A total of 152 parents and 155 adolescents from 15 national sites participated in the field testing of the program. Of this total, 18% were ordered by the courts to attend. Seventy percent (70%) of the adults were female; 30% were male. Forty-nine percent (49%) of the adolescents were female while 51% were male. Fifty-two percent (52%) of the adults were married; 25% indicated they were divorced; 7% were single; 10% said they were separated; and 4% were living with their mate. Seventy-nine percent (79%) of the teens indicated they were Caucasian; 9% Black; 5% Indian; 3% Hispanic; and 4% other. Eighty percent (80%) of the adults indicated they were Caucasian; 11% Black; 1% Indian; 2% Hispanic; and 6% other. Thirty-two percent (32%) of the parents indicated they were Protestant; 20% Catholic; 6% indicated they had no religious preference; while 32% indicated a wide range of religious preferences. Approximately 10% of the parents did not respond. Sixty-five percent (65%) of the parents indicated they completed high school; 29% completed four years of college; 6% indicated they completed post college degrees. Thirty-six percent (36%) of the adults indicated they were unemployed. Sixty-one percent (61%) indicated their family income was \$20,000 or below.

Table 1
Data Gathering Inventories

The Adult-Adolescent Parenting Inventory (AAPI)

The AAPI is an inventory designed to assess the parenting and child rearing attitudes of adults and adolescents. Responses generated from the inventory measure degrees of acceptance of appropriate expectations of children, empathy toward children's needs, belief in the use of corporal punishment, and parent-child role clarification.

The 16PF

A standardized norm-referenced personality inventory for adults measuring the polarities of 16 primary personality factors, and four secondary personality factors.

The High School Personality Questionnaire (HSPQ)

Same as the 16PF except it is designed for adolescents.

Family Environment Scale (FES)

The FES is designed to assess 10 characteristics of family interaction patterns including cohesion, conflict, expressiveness, independence, recreation, organization, control, moral-religious, achievement, and intellectual-cultural.

The Nurturing Quiz

AN informal criterion-referenced inventory designed to measure knowledge of appropriate behavior management strategies.

Family Social History Questionnaire (FSHQ)

The Family Social History Questionnaire was utilized to gather information about family members prior to treatment.

Program Evaluation Forms

Parents and adolescents completed program evaluation forms at the completion of each weekly session and following the completion of the entire 12-week treatment program.

Parenting Attitudes and Knowledge of Parents

Pretest and posttest data gathered from the administration of the Adult-Adolescent Parenting Inventory (AAPI) to adults indicated:

- Parents had significantly ($p < .001$) decreased their belief in corporal punishment and family role reversal, while significantly increasing ($p < .001$) their empathic awareness of teens' needs and appropriate developmental expectations.
- Parents had significantly ($p < .001$) increased their knowledge of appropriate strategies in behavior management as measured by the Nurturing Quiz.

Family Interaction Patterns

Parents and adolescents who participated in the field testing of Prototypes I and II of the Nurturing Parenting Program were requested to complete the Family Environment Scale (FES). The goal was to develop an interaction profile of families and to assess pretest and posttest changes. Responses to the FES range from a low of 1 to a high of 10 with scores ranging from 4 to 6 somewhat average. Pretest responses of the adolescents indicated their perceptions of family cohesion ($x = 3.8$), expressiveness ($x = 4.2$), activities/recreation ($x = 3.5$), moral/religious ($x = 4.1$), intellectual/cultural ($x = 2.9$), and family organization ($x = 4.1$) were somewhat low. Achievement ($x = 6.1$) and conflict ($x = 6.2$) were rated high. Other family interaction patterns were rated by adolescents to be average.

Posttest responses indicated a significant ($p < .002$) decrease in family conflict ($x = 6.2$ to $x = 4.1$) and in intellectual/cultural activities ($x = 5.2$ to $x = 2.9$). Other data tended to indicate an increase in family cohesion, independence, and control, while a decrease in family experiences although none of the increases were significant.

Pretest responses generated from the parents on the FES indicated somewhat low scores in family experiences ($x = 4.2$), conflict ($x = 4.2$), and active recreational ($x = 4.0$). Independence ($x = 5.9$) and moral/religious activities ($x = 5.7$) were rated somewhat high. Other family interactions areas were rated within the average range of scores.

Posttest responses by the parents indicated significant ($p < .001$) increases in family cohesion, expressiveness, independence, and intellectual/cultural activities. Parent responses also indicated significant ($p < .001$) decreases in conflict ($x = 4.2$ to $x = 3.2$) and intellectual/cultural activities ($x = 4.9$ to $x = 3.8$). Other areas tended to remain relatively the same.

Personality Characteristics of Parents and Adolescents

Insufficient reliable data were collected from both the parents and adolescents to be able to develop a participants personality profile. Encouraging parents and adolescents to complete the inventory at home and hand it in the following session resulted in too small an N to conduct reliable data.

Program Evaluation Questionnaire

Parents (98%) and adolescents (97%) who participated in the study overwhelmingly indicated the program had a positive impact in increasing the quality of their family relationships.

Summary

The data generated from the field testing of the Nurturing Parenting Program for Parents and Adolescents supports the reliability and validity of the intervention as a program designed to lessen parent-adolescent conflict by building nurturing interaction skills. The data also indicates that families will agree to attend and participate in getting healthy given the means to do so. Adolescents, as well as parents, made the commitment to attend. Only 18% of the families were ordered by the courts to attend. The remaining families attended voluntarily.

Parenting attitudes seem to be the key to changing parent-adolescent conflict. When attitudes become more positive and a commitment is made to enhancing the quality of the interactions, only then will parents and teens learn new ways of interacting. Clearly, attitudinal change then skill building appears to be the proper sequence of change. Any intervention designed to reduce or prevent family conflict has to be enjoyable enough to attend. It is here that sometimes change is painful, but the process of encouraging that change shouldn't have to be boring and stuffy. Like other Nurturing Parenting Programs, the right ingredients to family change include fun, new knowledge, creative expression, empathy, touch, and an overall sense that each person is important.