

# Parent Attitude Outcomes for Participants in the *Nurturing Parenting Program*

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## Background

Child abuse and neglect prevention is an important public policy priority to strengthen families and safeguard the security and well-being of children. The *Nurturing Parenting* program is a parent training program based on social learning theory and is designed to assess, treat and prevent or ameliorate abusive parenting attitudes and practices (Bavolek, 2014). The *Nurturing Parenting Program* (NPP) was selected by the state of North Dakota for usage as its primary parent training program with families involved in the child welfare system.

In North Dakota, in FY 2014 there were 23.9% ( $N=911$ ) of child abuse and neglect assessments that were referred for services required or recommended (ND DHS, 2015). The *Nurturing Parenting* program is a 16-week program that involves weekly meetings, group learning and discussion, and repetition of basic parental skills (Family Development Resources, 2015).

Research indicates that particular attitudes and beliefs are linked with parental practices that are associated with lower or higher risk of child abuse and neglect (Barth et al., 2005; Cowen, 2001). This study examined parental attitude variables linked with risk of child abuse or neglect among participants in *Nurturing Parenting* and outcomes associated with program involvement.

## Objectives

- **Analyze parent attitude outcomes of NPP participants in state child welfare system.**
- **Assess parent attitude changes associated with neglectful or abusive parenting behaviors.**
- **Explore practical and meaningful effects of participation in *Nurturing Parenting* on key attitudes associated with healthy parenting.**

## Methods

The evaluation of participants in the program used a pre- and post-test design to assess changes in parental attitudes before and after participation in the program. Program sessions occurred between summer of 2014 and spring 2015. One hundred and thirty-two participants completed the pre- and post-assessment. The participant mean scores for each Parenting Construct were calculated for pre- and post-measures and analyzed using a paired sample t-test analysis. Also, effect sizes using the Cohen's  $d$  statistics were calculated to assess the overall practical effect of the program on individuals participating at all sites evaluated.

## Measures

Results were gathered from participants who completed the AAPI-2 measure. The Adult and Adolescent Parenting Inventory (AAPI-2) is a valid and reliable instrument designed to measure parenting beliefs and attitudes. The instrument assesses parenting beliefs and attitudes across *five parenting constructs* that are associated with abusive and neglectful parenting behaviors. The measure consists of 40 items to which respondents indicate their level of agreement using a five point Likert scale, from *strongly agree* (1), to *strongly disagree* (5). Bavolek and Keene (1999) reported scale reliabilities ranging from  $\alpha = 0.86$  to  $\alpha = 0.96$ .

## Results

Participant findings showed significant differences on all of the 5 parent attitude constructs measured using the AAPI-2. Several points can be made related to the results:

- Participants noted moderate to substantial changes in all of the 5 parental constructs measured, with all of the changes showing positive increases (e.g., parents becoming more sensitive and empathic toward a child's needs).

### Table 1: Perceived Impacts on Parenting Attitudes of NPP

Parenting Construct	Before Participation (Mean Score)	After Participation (Mean Score)	Difference Between Mean Scores	t	d
Construct A – Expectations of Children	5.48 (SD = 1.90)	6.83 (SD = 1.64)	1.35 (increase)	-6.861	0.84
Construct B – Parental Empathy Toward Children's Needs	4.72 (SD = 2.23)	7.26 (SD = 2.02)	2.54 (increase)	-10.497	1.28
Construct C – Use of Corporal Punishment	5.41 (SD = 2.13)	7.65 (SD = 1.54)	2.24 (increase)	-10.49	1.27
Construct D – Parent-Child Family Roles	5.89 (SD = 1.93)	7.42 (SD = 1.78)	1.53 (increase)	-8.209	1.00
Construct E – Children's Power and Independence	5.69 (SD = 2.23)	6.98 (SD = 1.99)	1.29 (increase)	-5.337	0.65

Note:  $N = 132$ ,  $df = 131$ ; Continuum of each subscale is 1 (*low*) to 10 (*high*)  
•  $p < .01$

- The largest difference occurred in Parental Construct B, Parental Empathy Toward Children's Needs (+2.54), followed by more moderate increases in Constructs A (Expectations of Children), C (Use of Corporal Punishment), D (Parent-Child Family Roles), and E (Children's Power and Independence). The next-largest increases occurred in Constructs C and D.
- The increases that occurred in parental attitudes and beliefs were somewhat higher than would be expected to occur due to random chance, and thus a good indicator that the *Nurturing Parenting* program is having a positive influence on participants.
- Effect size calculations showed that program impacts ranged from a moderate positive effect ( $d = .65$ ) to a quite large positive effect size ( $d = 1.27$ ), depending on the construct being assessed.

## Conclusion

The data suggest that the NPP is having a modest and positive impact on those individuals who complete the 4-month parenting program, and assists parents toward beliefs and attitudes that are more nurturing and less likely to be at risk for child abuse or neglect. Effect sizes for different participant groups who engage in the program may vary due to maturity of the program site, experience of the course instructors, difficulties faced by program participants, and other factors. However, the findings shared here suggest the overall practical effect of the program on individuals at sites in North Dakota is positive.

## References

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