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SELECTING A PARENTING EDUCATION PROGRAM

Alabama Cooperative Extension was tasked with renewing the parenting education program for the state. Parenting education programs (PEP) are always in high demand, but many local agencies offer PEP, raising the question of how Extension could best add value. To assist with the selection of a new program, we conducted a review of the literature to identify parent education programs. Of particular interest were emotion-focused programs, which are consistent with the Auburn HDFS focus on strengthening relationships. Emotion coaching helps parents recognize their own and others' emotions and appropriately express their emotions (Katz, Maliken, & Stettler, 2012). Outcomes include better child adjustment, reduced exposure to violence in the home, and reduced risk of maltreatment (Katz, Maliken, & Stettler, 2012). Emotion coaching is also suitable for all families, though, and helps foster loving and supportive relationships.

PROGRAM INCLUSION CRITERIA

Extension required a program that allowed evaluation and data collection, had been formally tested in research studies, is adaptable for local delivery, and has curriculum structure that helps ensure program fidelity across diverse deliveries.

1. Cost-effective
2. Publicly available and free to participants
3. Evidence-based (through peer-review studies)
4. Contemporary
5. Relevant to Alabama population (meet an identified need)
6. Include structured curriculum which can be adapted to local audiences
7. Allow ownership of data collected for Extension
8. Enable and support federal outcome reporting requirements PLUS
 1. Has been delivered multiple times (is not untested)
 2. Focused on parents of young children (2-5)
 3. Focused on social-emotional development/social competence

SEARCH PROCESS

Part 1: Search for and review parent education programs that met inclusion criteria.

1. Research Database search
 - Google Scholar
 - Academic Search Premiere
1. Evidence-based registries
 2. SAMSHA's National Registry of Evidence-based Programs and Practices
 3. Blueprints for Healthy Youth Development
 4. Promising Practices Network
 5. California Child Welfare Clearinghouse
 6. Social Programs that Work, Coalition for Evidenced-based Policy
 7. Collaborative for Academic, Social and Emotional Learning (CASEL) – pending review

Part 2: A review of programs offered locally in Alabama (report in progress). It was difficult to determine locally available programs: see recommendations.

RESULTS: PROGRAMS (A) EVIDENCE-BASED; (B) REPORT SOCIAL EMOTIONAL COMPONENT OR PERSPECTIVE; (C) PUBLICLY AVAILABLE; (D) AND OTHER CRITERIA

Figure 1. Program characteristics.

Program Name (Year of Origination)* (note that many programs are adapted locally and over time)	Age of Children	Group or Home-Visiting (HV)	Length of Program	Facilitator Training and Qualifications (annual certification required by some programs)
Incredible Years (1984) (Preschool Basic IV) (1992)	3 - 6	Group	18 - 20 wks	3-day training; self- and peer-evaluations as facilitate first 2 groups; weekly peer review Professionals, therapists, and parent educators from psychology, social work, education, nursing, psychiatry; knowledge of child development and cognitive social learning theory recommended + 2 years experience working with young children
Parents as Teachers (1984)	Prenatal - 5	HV	2 - 3 yrs	Foundational (3-day) and Model Implementation (2-day); 2 hrs. individual reflection + 2 staff meetings/month High school diploma or GED + two years supervised experience with young children and/or parents;
HIPPY (1969)	3 - 5	HV + group meetings	30 wks	Initial training in use of curriculum + weekly meetings with coordinators Facilitated by community members and program parents
Group Triple P-Positive Parenting Program (1977)	Up to 12	Group	5 sessions	3 day training, 1.5 day skills-based accreditation process + monthly peer support meetings Child development knowledge is desirable
Circle of Security – P (COS-P) (2007)	0 - 5	Group	8 wks	4-day training for anyone providing parent education and/or counseling to parents of young children
Nurturing Parenting Programs (1983)	Birth - 5	Group and HV	Varies	3-day workshop Professionals or paraprofessionals with social work, education, and/or psychology training and related experience
Healthy Families America (HFA) (1992)	Birth - 5	HV	3 - 5 yrs	4-day training
Families and Schools Together (FAST) – Pre-School Level (1988)	3 - 4	Group	8 wks. + two yrs. of monthly meetings	2-day orientation 4 - 8 person team of parents, teachers, school reps, and community-based professionals
Early Childhood Systematic Training for Effective Parenting (STEP) (1976)	Birth - 5	Group	7 wks	1-day training workshop offered but not required; Counselor, social worker, or individual who participated in STEP workshop
1-2-3 Magic (1984)	2 - 12	Group	4 - 8 wks	3 - 5 hour onsite training Mental health providers or teachers
Strengthening Families Program (1980's); 3 - 5 year-old (2000's)	3 - 5	Group	14 sessions	2-day training Recommended support from site coordinator with Bachelor's-level degree in social science program
Tuning Into Kids (Australia) (1999)	3 - 5	Group	6 - 8 wks	2-day training Anyone working with parents in professional capacity

Figure 2. Theoretical Approaches Guiding Development of Parent Education Program Curriculum

Parenting Education Program	Social learning theory	Ecological model	Human ecology	Social Ecological Theory	Attachment theory	Social Information Processing Models	Family Systems Theory	Self-Efficacy Theory	Behavioral Theoretical Framework	Family Stress Theory	Emotional Intelligence/Competence
Incredible Years Preschool Basic	✓										
Parents as Teachers			✓								
HIPPY		✓									
Triple P Positive Parenting Program	✓					✓					
Circle of Security					✓						
Nurturing Parenting Programs					✓		✓				
Healthy Families America (HFA)					✓						
Families and Schools Together – FAST				✓			✓			✓	
Early Childhood Systematic Training for Effective Parenting – STEP		✓					✓			✓	
1-2-3 Magic								✓	✓		
Strengthening Families Program	✓						✓				
Tuning Into Kids (Australia)											✓

Katz, L. E., Maliken, A. C., & Stettler, N. M. (2012). Parental meta-emotion philosophy: A review of research and theoretical framework. *Child Development Perspectives*, 6(4), 417-422.

FINDINGS: LACK OF CLARITY AND POTENTIAL MISMATCH WITH COMMUNITY-BASED DELIVERY

Key Points:

Parent Education Program (PEP) curricula have been developed over decades. Evolution over time has made it difficult to determine how the programs, as delivered, achieve their stated and tested outcomes. Community-based delivery is responsive to community needs and locally engaged, but local adaptations limit our understanding of key program processes.

PEP are often unclear about how they implement theory-based principles

- Local programming meets unique community needs BUT limits our understanding of
- Program effectiveness
- Level of program fidelity
- Who is and is not being served
- What is being taught
- How it is delivered
- Educational preparation of program facilitators
- Program delivery seems to be aimed at parents identified as "at-risk"
- Potential mismatch between universal program design and program implementation
- Programs may not be designed for the client base receiving them
- Possible access barriers to parents that could benefit from parent education knowledge
- Prevents prevention and general parenting support

1. Program-Audience Mismatch

- Curriculum are developed for universal audiences, but community programs are delivered to more limited audiences
- Program materials are often unclear about how parents enroll and who is eligible.

Recommendation #1: Program developers should be publicly clear, transparent, and specific about the intended audience. Programs should report on the specific recruitment strategies utilized to recruit program participants.

2. Clarify Use of a Strengths-based Approach

- Programs are obscure about whether or how they implement a strengths-based approach or assess it

Recommendation #2: Program developers should be clear about how to utilize a strength-based approach during implementation and explain how it contributes to program success. Program educators should document and report on their use of a strengths-based approach during program implementation

3. Diverse Program Delivery Contexts and Unclear Outcomes

- Localized delivery is strong in engagement but also generates variation in PEP delivery
- There is a lack of documented evidence on how facilitator-parent relationships may change program outcomes

Recommendation #3: Document and report site-specific processes and program modifications for public clarity

Recommendation #4: Conduct basic research on facilitator/educator success and impacts

4. Mismatch Between Program Goals and Intended Outcomes

- Program websites are often unclear about how participation will result in intended outcomes
- Outcomes are often not publicly available, even if they are presumably required by funders, making it difficult for us and the public to judge efficacy

Recommendation #5: Be transparent in how program processes are measured so that parents can understand how processes contribute to program success

5. Program Curriculum Delivery Variation

- Local variation and adaptation makes it difficult to determine if programs are being delivered in in accord with research-based evidence on outcomes
- There is a lack of transparency in how development theories are being matched to curriculum and outcomes (Figure 2)

Recommendation #6: Be clear and transparent in curriculum guidance materials on the theoretical frameworks or approach.

6. Evidence of Program Effectiveness

- Localized evaluations seem to be tailored for funders
- There are not enough independent evaluations of PEP deliveries to determine if intended outcomes are achieved "in the field"
- Variation in evaluation approaches makes it difficult to determine if programs are effective with the populations being served and whether desired outcomes are being achieved

Recommendation #7: Conduct research on samples of programs "as delivered"

KEY MESSAGES

1. PROGRAMS NEED TO BE TRANSPARENT ABOUT WHAT THEY ARE OFFERING

- Local, community-based agencies should publicly state **WHO** the parenting education is for, **HOW** parents can access programs, and **WHAT** the expected outcomes are (e.g. child behavior change, decreased parental stress, etc.)

2. PARENTING EDUCATION CURRICULUM DEVELOPERS SHOULD CONSISTENTLY USE EDUCATIONAL CURRICULUM TERMS

- Programs should consistently refer to national framework descriptors to describe their parent education curriculum

3. CONSISTENT TERMS FOR OUTCOMES, DIVERSITY, INNOVATION

- Researchers and PEP developers need to adopt consistent terms to describe parent education programs; this will lead to better understanding of diversity in local delivery, and to increased understanding of innovation

4. FOCUS ON SUCCESS

- Providers (educators) should regularly share specific processes that contribute to parent education program success to help build the field

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