

Developing and Piloting the Family Care Curriculum: Parenting in the Context of Race, Class, & Homelessness

Project Summary: National experts approximate that 2.5 million, or 1 in 30, children experience a period of homelessness each year. Unfortunately, Philadelphia has the worst poverty rate of the ten largest U.S. cities, with startling 38% of children falling at or below poverty levels and at risk of experiencing homelessness. Children, families of color and those households headed by single women are most affected by poverty.²⁰ These young children and their families are disproportionately more likely to experience a myriad of stressors. Left unaddressed, these stress experiences can adversely influence children’s short and long-term growth, development, and well-being.

Research suggests positive parent-child relationships may help mitigate the negative effects of childhood homelessness and other adverse childhood experiences by helping children to better manage their emotions, to self-regulate, and with their executive functioning.^{7, 27, 33-35} Positive parent-child relationships are depicted by parents having developmentally appropriate expectations and supervision; warm, encouraging, and responsive verbal exchanges with their child(ren); and regarding their child(ren) as their own separate person.

Parenting for families faced with homelessness presents unique challenges that affect parental capacity to parent (e.g. high levels of stress, uncertainty, and fear about monitoring children). Families experiencing homelessness may also be faced with multiple marginalized identities due to systems of oppression related to race, class, and gender.

While positive parenting program models exist,^{34, 36-38} few specifically address parenting in the context of homelessness or near-homelessness.^{33, 35, 39, 40} Existing programs have shown mixed findings and few traditional behavioral-oriented and attachment-based parenting programs models, including those for families experiencing homelessness acknowledge that parents may belong to multiple social categories like race, socioeconomic position, gender that result in marginalization.

Our research team is working to address these gaps in existing programs by integrating an *intersectionality* framework¹³ into the original FCC program’s pedagogical principles (Figure 1) (Social Learning Theory⁴¹ and Attachment Theory⁴²). The original FCC model, developed by Sheller and Hudson, was designed specifically for parents and children living in emergency and transitional housing. FCC is a six-week theory-based positive parenting intervention designed to support and scaffold positive parenting in families experiencing homelessness. FCC uses a train-the-trainer approach and synthesizes research and best practices from a variety of disciplines and frameworks, including social work, family therapy, attachment theory, trauma-informed care, social-learning theory, and self-care.

Integration of *intersectionality* into this positive parenting program models brings awareness to historical and traumatic experiences that stem from systems and practices rooted in slavery and institutionalized racism, gender-based discrimination, and other institutionalized social structures of oppression and their potential impact of parent-child relationships and development.

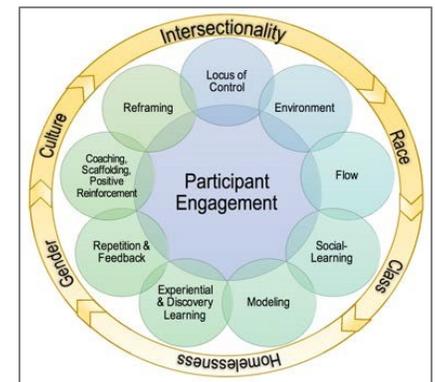


Figure 1. Integration of Intersectionality with FCC Pedagogical Principles

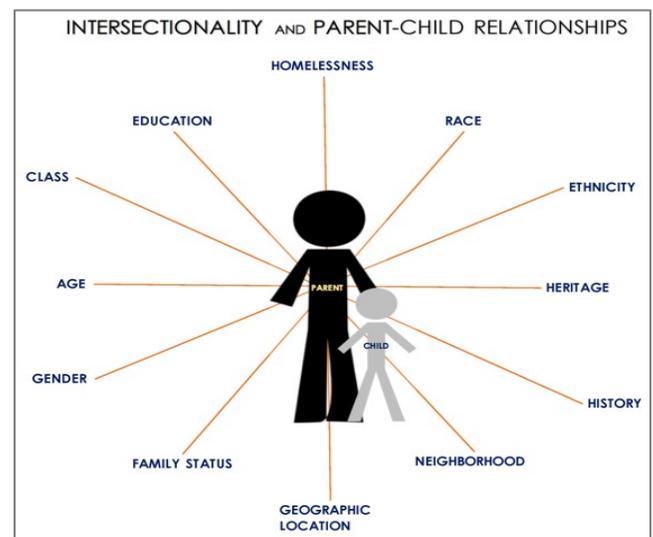


Figure 2. Intersectionality and Parent-Child Relationships

FCC-Revised will help parents experiencing homelessness to: 1) raise their awareness and increase processing around how racism, classism, oppression, and other past life circumstances can impact family and parent-child relationships; and 2) support parents experiencing homelessness in their efforts to actualize their feelings of love, nurturing and support for their child(ren), in the face of difficult and stressful histories and life circumstances.

We are currently conducting work to evaluate treatment acceptability, feasibility and outcomes of FCC in Philadelphia homeless shelters. In addition, we are working to refine the FCC intervention manual to comprehensively address issues of intersectionality and parenting in the context of race, class, and homelessness. We are continuing to develop FCC so that it outlines the specific issues, therapeutic challenges, and preventative intervention strategies pertinent to working with families experiencing homelessness or near-homelessness, particularly issues of:

- Parent-child attachment
- Intergenerational transmission of trauma (including institutionalized racism and classism)
- Positive identity development and resource building.

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