

Choosing a Parenting Curriculum for Your Program

Parent activities to promote child learning and development, 45 CFR § 1302.51 (b):

A program must, at minimum, offer opportunities for parents to participate in a research-based parenting curriculum that builds on parents' knowledge and offers parents the opportunity to practice parenting skills to promote children's learning and development. A program that chooses to make significant adaptations to the parenting curriculum to better meet the needs of one or more specific populations must work with an expert or experts to develop such adaptations.



Background

This Head Start Program Performance Standard is based on theories and practices that have emerged in recent research related to supporting parental knowledge, skills and confidence. Research has shown that infant, toddler, and preschool programs can positively impact parenting practices when they go beyond simply providing parenting information. There are greater benefits to parents and children when programs offer parents exposure to a series of skill building experiences that model positive interactions and provide opportunities to practice those skills with feedback.¹ These experiences help parents feel more confident about their ability to be good parents to their children. There are also additional benefits, as parents have opportunities to support their own well-being, build relationships with staff, and engage with peers.

Parenting Curriculum Decision-Making Checklist

Head Start and Early Head Start programs must ensure the parenting curriculum they choose:

- Is research-based (at a minimum; see definitions on page 2); and
- Provides parents with opportunities to practice skills.

Head Start and Early Head Start programs should also consider these important features that define a parenting curriculum:

- Is it delivered to parents as the intended and primary audience?
- Is it delivered in a time-limited or ongoing manner?
- Does it include structured, sequenced learning activities for parents that focus on two or more of the following domains of learning?:
 - Nurturing (warmth, responsiveness, and sensitivity)
 - Discipline (providing limits, teaching self-control, handling challenging child behaviors)
 - Teaching (conveying information or skills)
 - Language (conversations)
 - Supervision (watchfulness)
- Does it consist of three or more sessions?*
- Does it have a detailed manual or facilitator's guide that describes the content, order, and delivery of each session?
- Is it available for public use?
- Can it be implemented in center- or home-based early childhood settings or a community-based organization?

*Recommendation: Group size of 5 to 25 participants; sessions of 45 to 120 minutes and scheduled 1-2 weeks apart

¹ Yoshikawa, H. Testimony to the Senate HELP Committee- Full-Committee Hearing on Supporting Children and Families through Investments in High-Quality Early Education, February 6, 2014.

Understanding What We Mean by Research-Based Curricula

There are three categories of research-based curricula that meet the requirements for the related performance standard. There is a fourth category of curricula, research informed, that is necessary, but not sufficient to meet the performance standard.

Research Informed (necessary, but not sufficient to meet standard)

- ▶ Is based on solid theory and practice research about parenting concepts and skills, and the influence of parenting on child development, behavior, learning, and/or well-being.
- ▶ Is based on and encourages the use of adult learning strategies and activities that have shown through research to have positive effects on adult change in attitudes and practices.
- ▶ Is based on solid theory and practice research about the relationship of parenting concepts and skills to child developmental and well-being outcomes.

Research-Based:

- ▶ Includes everything in the Research Informed category, and
- ▶ Has a descriptive evaluation of the curriculum that includes a formal report. This report may or may not be published in a peer-reviewed journal.
- ▶ The report should contain information about how the curriculum can make a difference in parents' experience and parenting attitudes and practice.
- ▶ The report may also include information about how the curriculum may influence children's development, learning, and well-being.

Promising Research-Based:

- ▶ Includes everything in the Research Informed and Research-Based categories, and
- ▶ Has at least one quasi-experimental study report published in a peer-reviewed journal.
- ▶ The study should show that the curriculum leads to the desired positive changes in parenting attitudes and practices.
- ▶ The study may also show changes in children's development, learning, and well-being.

Evidence/Research-Based:

- ▶ Includes everything in the Research Informed, Research-Based and Promising Research-Based categories; and
- ▶ Has more than one strong, quasi-experimental and/or random assignment study (or set of studies) published in a peer-reviewed journal.
- ▶ The studies should show that the curriculum leads to the desired positive changes in parenting attitudes and practices.
- ▶ The studies may also show changes in children's development, learning, and well-being.

Understanding Research Study Designs

- ▶ A **Descriptive Study** looks at the experience and perceptions of a group of people who participate in an intervention/curriculum. It will either:
 - Ask participants at the end of the intervention/curriculum for their impressions of the process and what attitudes/skills/practices they learned or changed, or
 - Ask participants about their attitudes/skills/practices before they begin the intervention and again when they have completed the intervention.
- ▶ A **Quasi-experimental Study** compares groups of people who participate in an intervention/curriculum to those who do not participate. Participants in this type of study are intentionally assigned to one of the groups. They are not assigned randomly (by chance or random assignment) to the groups. This type of study is better able to show how the intervention/curriculum causes the parent outcomes that are measured.
- ▶ A **Random Assignment/Randomized Control Trial (RCT) Study** compares groups of people who participate in an intervention/curriculum to those who do not participate. It is often referred to as an experimental study. Participants in this type of study are assigned randomly (by chance or random assignment) to one of the groups. This type of study is the most certain way to show that the intervention/curriculum causes the parent outcomes that are measured. RCTs often show the link between the intervention/curriculum's impact on parenting practices and the influence of those changes on child outcomes.

Note: Any quality evaluation or study should include sound research methods and strong and appropriate tools to measure all of the elements or aspects of the study. The evaluation report should include:

- A description of the intervention/curriculum and how it was implemented with fidelity.
- A description of the implementation process, including the parent participants, the setting, the organizational and/or community context, recruitment methods, and how long and consistently people participated.
- An analysis that is anchored in generally accepted ways of using statistics and/or qualitative methods (for example, interviews or focus groups).
- A summary with the implications and limitations of the study. Implications are the findings for practice. Limitations of the study include guidance about how the field should (or should not) apply the conclusions.

For more information about this resource, please contact us:

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