

FAMILY-BASED INTERVENTIONS WITH CHILDREN AND ADOLESCENTS

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THE CASE FOR FAMILY-BASED INTERVENTIONS: WAYS TO ENGAGE PARENTS IN CLINICAL AND EDUCATIONAL SETTINGS

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*“Parenting interventions are among the most powerful and cost-effective
tools available to improve children’s health and well-being”
(Sanders, 2008, p.13).*

A. Epidemiological studies indicate that a variety of risk factors strongly influence child and adolescent development. These risk factors include:

1. Poor parenting that includes harsh, inflexible, rigid or inconsistent discipline practices, inadequate supervision and inadequate involvement with their child’s academic and social development;
2. Lack of warm positive relationship with parents that contribute to insecure attachments;
3. Marital conflict and breakdown, exposure and experience of family violence;
4. Parental psychopathology (particularly maternal depression and father antisocial behaviors and presence of substance abuse in the family);
5. Absence of protective factors such as social supports (“guardian angels”) and opportunities to develop resilience and competencies.
6. For children living under high-risk conditions, the quality of parenting they receive is especially critical. The quality of the parent-child relationship has a strong association with child outcomes, especially social adjustment and educational attainment. The degree to which the family provides children with the bedrock of emotional security (attachment relationships, paternal presence, maternal sensitivity and responsiveness), social skills to cope with life, parental teaching behaviors and the provision of learning materials and activities can buffer children from risk and nurture strengths and resilience.

The presence of risk factors and the absence of protective factors increase the risk of children and adolescents developing major behavioral and emotional problems including antisocial behaviors, substance abuse, juvenile criminal acts, depression and anxiety disorders.

- B. See the Melissa Institute Website for **HANDOUTS** from previous conferences that document these developmental trajectories of aggressive and resilient behaviors.

www.melissainstitute.org

www.teachsafeschools.org

- C. See the list of **REFERENCES** and **WEBSITES** below that provide illustrative evidence-based programs of family-based interventions for a variety of clinical problems.
- D. A number of preventative programs designed to improve parenting skills have been developed and implemented. For example, see Chorpita and Daleiden (2010), Prinz et al., (2009), Sanders et al. (2004, 2010) and Scott (2010). The Sander's TRIPLE-P (Positive Parenting Program) utilizes five levels of intervention ranging from a media-based parent information campaign through broad-focused parent training to intensive family interventions. Also see Melissa Institutes ACT parent training programs conducted by Trish Ramsey (www.melissainstitute.org).
- E. Family-based Interventions may take several different forms. These include:

Parallel Treatment of child/youth and family (address parent psychopathology and discord)

Combined Family Treatment (may include extended family members)

Conjoint Family Treatment with intermittent combined treatment sessions

Group Family Treatment

Group Parent Treatment

Multisystemic therapy - - involve family with other groups (schools, churches, peers)

Parent Psychoeducation Training

Preventative Parent Training Programs

Parents can be viewed as co-clients, collaborators, co-therapists, and a combination of these diverse roles.

- F. Finally, parental involvement and support are critical to the development of their child's academic performance, school attendance and motivation to achieve. When parents fail to encourage and reward their child's school performance, fail to read with their child, monitor homework, attend teacher meetings, participate in school-related activities, and the like, educators readily tend to "blame" the parents.

"The parents are too overwhelmed, stressed, uninterested. They fail to fully appreciate and they doubt the value of education. Such factors as language barriers, cultural differences with school personnel, parental illiteracy, poverty, lack of time, transportation, child care, and the like, each contribute to the lack

of parent involvement.”

It is possible, however that part of the reason for parent non-involvement and support is due to a lack of school-based initiatives. The following **PARENT INVOLVEMENT QUESTIONNAIRE** taken from D. Meichenbaum and A. Biemiller’s (1998) book Nurturing independent learners: Helping students take charge of their learning. (Cambridge, MA: Brookline Books) provides suggestions on how educators can reach out to parents. How many of the following activities does your school engage in? Which behaviors might your school consider adding?

SCHOOL-INITIATIVE CHECKLIST TO INCREASE PARENT INVOLVEMENT

This questionnaire is designed to determine how your school involves parents in the education of their children. It provides a list of possible ways to involve parents in terms of:

- (a) communication (both written and oral) about school activities and about specific topics such as homework;
- (b) possible collaborative activities with parents; and
- (c) administrative support for parent involvement.

There are no right or wrong answers to these questions. The intent of this questionnaire is to have educators consider and reflect upon the many ways to involve parents in the education of their children. Certainly, the feasibility of some of these suggestions will vary depending upon the grade level, subject area, and school setting. **Please duplicate this Questionnaire if you wish to use it.** We have provided space for you to indicate other ways you and your school have involved parents. Please feel free to send these suggestions to us so that we can revise the questionnaire. (Make suggestions to Don Meichenbaum at dhmeich@aol.com)

COMMUNICATION WITH PARENTS

The teacher/educator should answer each of the following questions circling YES or NO.

A. Written communication with parents

- | | | |
|-----|----|---|
| YES | NO | 1. At the beginning of the school year, I send a letter home to each parent. |
| | | 2. In my written correspondence with parents I: |
| YES | NO | (a) mention how much I look forward to working with their son/daughter and with them. |
| YES | NO | (b) comment on the need for parents and teachers to act as collaborators and partners and have a continuing exchange, and I encourage them to be an advocate for their child. |
| YES | NO | (c) indicate that I will call them when I need their help, as well as when their |

- son/daughter does well.
- YES NO (d) extend an invitation to parents to call me to arrange a visit to meet (highlight the importance of two-way communication).
- YES NO 3. I provide parents with a written general description of what we will be working on during the term and why these activities are important.
- YES NO 4. Later in the school year, I provide parents with an ongoing assignment calendar of the work we will be covering in class over the next few weeks and why this work is important (e.g., description of unit objectives, types of problems and assignments, and ways in which students will be assessed; lists of books to be used, recommended children's books, and upcoming school events).
- YES NO 5. I provide parents with ongoing written communication in the form of a class newsletter about what the class has been doing and learning, and some of the things students will be learning in the future. (Students can participate in the production of this newsletter.)
- YES NO 6. I indicate to parents that over the course of the school year, their son/daughter will be asked to interview them (or other family members, relatives, neighbors) about learning and helping strategies, and about when they use math and written language in their day-to-day activities.
- YES NO 7. I indicate that students will be bringing home a folder of their school-work labelled TAKE HOME/BRING BACK. There will be space for parents to initial and comment on this work.
- YES NO 8. I provide parents with a survey/questionnaire to provide information about their child's reading behavior (e.g., average amount of reading time per week, leisure reading habits, favorite books, reading strengths and weaknesses).
- YES NO 9. I occasionally send parents a Teacher-Gram email and invite them to send back a Parent-Gram email about their child's progress.

B. Oral communication (phone calls/meetings) with parents

- YES NO 10. I call each parent (at least once per term) to give positive feedback (i.e., convey something their child did well).
- YES NO 11. The ratio of positive to negative phone calls that I make to parents per month is 3 or 4 to 1.
- YES NO 12. I keep track (in a running log) of each parent telephone call, recording the date, the name of the student, whom I spoke to, the topic, the parent's reactions, and any follow-up plan.
- YES NO 13. I schedule meetings with parents to review their children's progress.
- YES NO 14. At these meetings, I usually indicate what their child has studied in class, and discuss their child's study habits (finishing assignments, studying, helping others), academic achievement, and classroom behavior.
- YES NO 15. At parent-teacher conferences, I have students attend so they can actively participate (e.g., show work from their portfolios, become self-advocates). Students are advised beforehand on how to contribute to these sessions.

YES NO 16. I encourage students to share with their parents what they do in class, in their homework, and in their other school activities.

C. Communication with parents about homework.

YES NO 17. I inform parents about my expectations concerning homework (e.g., amount, time schedule) and comment on the benefits of student's doing homework.

YES NO 18. I provide parents with a list of suggestions on how they can help their son/daughter with homework (e.g., ways parents and students can work out rules related to the setting, times, and routine, ways to provide help contingent on their child's request and need, ways to monitor homework loosely, ways to balance homework with other activities).

YES NO 19. I ask parents for their observations on their child's homework activities (e.g., difficulties, limitations, what went well). I ask parents to initial the homework assignments.

YES NO 20. I provide parents with specific suggestions for working with their children (e.g., read for 15 minutes with their children most nights; ask their children about their school activities and what they have learned each day in school).

YES NO 21. I provide parents with books and other learning materials to use at home and with their children.

YES NO 22. I encourage parents to give their children home roles and responsibilities, especially those that involve serving others and that occur on a routine basis (setting the table, doing shopping, etc.).

D. Involvement of parents

YES NO 23. I invite parents into my classroom to observe teacher-led and student-led activities (e.g., how I read stories aloud to students, how students do cross-age tutoring, etc.).

YES NO 24. I review with parents how they can make their home more literacy-friendly (encourage their children's leisure reading behavior).

YES NO 25. I invite parents to assist in my class.

YES NO 26. I make parents feel welcome when they visit my class (e.g., have students give tours, have a display center with sample work available, have a list of things parents can do to help).

YES NO 27. I encourage parents to keep a running diary or journal of their children's progress and difficulties and to share this with me.

YES NO 28. I review with parents biographical information about their son/daughter and journal entries they have provided.

YES NO 29. I welcome parent evaluation of my teaching practices, students' progress, and class and school programs.

YES NO 30. I solicit information from parents about their interests, talents and hobbies so I can request their involvement and help.

- YES NO 31. I provide students with tasks or games in which they can involve their parents.
- YES NO 32. I provide parents with a list of choices of how they might become involved at school and/or at home with their child's education.

E. Administrative support for parent involvement

- YES NO 33. My school views parents as partners in the students' education.
- YES NO 34. My principal and/or department head encourage parental involvement and the maintenance of ongoing parental contact (in writing, phone calls, emails, meetings).
- YES NO 35. My school holds workshops for teachers on how to work collaboratively with parents.
- YES NO 36. My school has created an environment that is inviting to parents (e.g., signs welcome parents into the school; office staff welcomes them; teachers greet parents when they pass them in the hall; there is a parent reception area with relevant written material and newsletters).
- YES NO 37. My school has a parent-teacher association that meets regularly.
- YES NO 38. My school solicits parent input on important decisions concerning their children (parents are members of the governing council of the school).
- YES NO 39. My school has a parents' night (or family night, or grandparents' gala) when parents can participate in tours and activities and discuss their child's progress with the teacher (e.g., a portfolio night when students can show their work).
- YES NO 40. My school invites parents to participate in school activities (e.g., staff the library, chaperone school trips, share ethnic activities, help with fund-raising).
- YES NO 41. My school has special events for parents to discuss particular topics (e.g., parent involvement, report cards, transitions to new grades such as middle to high school, selection of courses, school-bullying, cyber bullying drug abuse, etc.).
- YES NO 42. My school holds special evening sessions for parents in learning-related activities (e.g., how to help with homework, how to read to students, how to bolster student's self-esteem, why some students succeed in school).
- YES NO 43. My school has parents' night on a specific subject (e.g., math night) so parents can understand what and how the students are being taught.
- YES NO 44. My school has a back-to-school night during which parents are invited to experience the kinds of activities and tasks their children are asked to perform in class.
- YES NO 45. My school involves students, teachers, and parents in cooperative learning activities in which they assist each other in achieving learning tasks and goals.
- YES NO 46. Parents attend an "open house" where students have opportunities to showcase their work. Students rehearse for this event.
- YES NO 47. My school has encouraged parents to identify with its mission statement.
- YES NO 48. My school provides both before-school and after-school programs for students to help accommodate parent's work schedules.

- YES NO 49. My school is located in a high-poverty area, and we have undertaken such activities as having parent night in a local church or Laundromat (e.g., offering free use of the Laundromat with a parent visit).
- YES NO 50. My school provides or helps coordinate with other agencies a home-visiting outreach program.
- YES NO 51. My school provides specific skill programs for parents (e.g., helping parents improve their literary skills) or referrals to other services.
- YES NO 52. My school provides support to parents in obtaining their GED.
- YES NO 53. My school is involved in a parent literacy program (e.g., after-school educational assistance to children in the presence of their parents).
- YES NO 54. My school provides transportation and day-care services when parents are visiting the school.
- YES NO 55. Parents are notified immediately about unexplained student absences.
- YES NO 56. My school has an active truancy prevention program that involves parents.
- YES NO 57. My school has established involvement and activities with local business and community leaders (e.g., an apprenticeship program).
- YES NO 58. Parents in my school view their involvement as a responsibility to their children.
- YES NO 59. Parents are asked to sign a contract indicating their responsibilities to the education of their children.
- YES NO 60. We monitor parent involvement and try to understand the factors that contribute to their non-involvement (e.g., failure to attend meetings, volunteer, call or meet with the teacher, review students homework, portfolio, etc.).

Please indicate any additional activities and procedures you use to involve parents, or ideas about what you would like to see your school employ. (*Email suggestions to Dr. Meichenbaum dhmeich@aol.com*)

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