Improving Youth & Family Programs:
Drawing on Principles of Effectiveness

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Introductions

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Think about one of the more established and effective youth or family programs in your organization.

What is it about how the program works that leads to positive impacts on youth and families?
Wow! You have three masters degrees and a PhD!

Yes, it's all very impressive, but interestingly, I have no common sense whatsoever.

That's not the sort of thing you should say during a job interview.

I don't see why not.
A common sense approach: Evidence-Informed Program Improvement

- Ineffective & unproven programs
- Evidence-based programs

Improve existing programs & develop new ones with evidence-based principles
Key principles of effective youth and family programs
Four Categories of Principles for Effective Programs

- Design & content
- Relevance
- Delivery
- Assessment & quality assurance
Program design and content

- Theory driven & research-based
- Sufficient dosage and intensity
- Comprehensive
- Limit use of fear and punishment
- Active learning techniques
Target relevant risk and protective factors and assets

Address dynamic risk & protective factors
Theory-driven

A good road map is essential
Sample logic model

Adolescent Mothers Breastfeeding Program

Program Theory:
- Ecological Systems
- TTM & Stages of Change

Influential Factors:
- Knowledge of risks/benefits
- Social Support
- Intention to breastfeed
- Confidence in ability/skill
- Access to breastfeeding space, materials, and help

Program Activities:
1. School-Based Breastfeeding Education and Support
2. Community-Based Role Models for Adolescent Mothers
3. Hospital-Based Breastfeeding Education and Support

Inputs/Resources:
- Collaboration between schools, county, and hospital
- Trained Staff & Volunteers
- Adolescent Participants
- Targeted Curriculum
- Equipment
- Funding

Program Goals and Outcomes:

Short
- Increase knowledge of short and long term benefits and consequences of breastfeeding to mother and child
- Increase exposure to breastfeeding positive female role models
- Strengthen intention to breastfeed before the child’s birth

Medium
- Increase mother’s confidence in ability (self-efficacy) to begin & maintain breastfeeding
- Provide opportunities (space, time, materials) for mothers to breastfeed
- Increase skills related to breastfeeding

Long
- Increase communication and collaboration between high schools, county public health and hospital concerning breastfeeding among adolescent mothers
- Decrease risk factors associated with decision not to breastfeed among adolescent mothers
- Increase breastfeeding initiation and maintenance among adolescent mothers in Blank County, WI

Problem or Issue:
Increase breastfeeding among adolescent mothers
Questions to consider

1. Is there a logic to your program and the activities that comprise it?
2. Can you explain the program theory guiding the program and its activities?
3. What research is there to support the theory’s validity?
4. Which risk and protective factors and/or assets does your program target?
5. Which should it target?
Sufficient dosage and intensity
Questions to consider

1. How does your program dosage compare to that of similar evidence-based programs?
2. Are the number of hours and sessions sufficient for the outcomes you aim to achieve?
3. Does your program include any booster sessions or other ongoing contact with participants to help them maintain changes in their behavior after the program has ended?
Comprehensive

Simple solutions rarely work
Questions to consider

1. Does your program address a sufficient variety and number of processes, people and/or settings that research identifies as important for bringing about desired changes?
2. What additional processes, people or settings could be targeted to strengthen the program?
Limit use of fear and punishment

Scare tactics rarely work
Questions to consider

1. Are fear and punishment a part of your program’s design?
2. What strategies other than fear or punishment does research suggest for reducing negative attitudes or behaviors?
3. What positive competencies and skills does your program promote that research identifies as important?
Use active learning techniques

“Tell me and I forget. Show me and I remember. Involve me and I understand.”
Chinese Proverb
1. Does your program provide opportunities for active participation?
2. Does the program provide multiple ways for participants to learn?
3. What opportunities are there for participants to practice new skills and behaviors and apply them to their own situations?
4. Are there opportunities for ‘trouble-shooting’ problems that arise?
Program design and content

Effective programs...

- Target relevant risk and protective factors and assets
- Are theory-driven
- Are of sufficient dosage and intensity
- Are comprehensive
- Limit use of fear and punishment
- Use active learning approaches
Talk amongst yourselves
Questions to consider

1. Is there a logic to your program and the activities that comprise it?
2. Can you explain the program theory guiding the program and its activities?
3. What research is there to support the theory’s validity?
4. Which risk and protective factors and/or assets does your program target?
5. Which should it target?
Program Relevance

- Developmentally appropriate
- Appropriately timed
- Socio-culturally relevant
Developmentally appropriate

One size does not fit all
Questions to consider

1. Does your program target risk and protective factors or assets that are relevant for the participants’ ages and developmental stages?
2. Is the age range of your audience so broad that the program’s content is not relevant for all participants?
3. Does participant recruitment focus on those individuals for whom the program is most appropriate?
4. How can you make your program more developmentally appropriate?
Appropriately timed

Participants must be ready
Questions to consider

1. Do you have a method for assessing whether an individual or family is ready for your program?

2. What events or transitions can you identify that might motivate youth or families to participate in your program?

3. Do you connect participants with other local services that can help them meet immediate needs or overcome obstacles to learning?
Socio-culturally relevant
Questions to consider

1. Are the staff and volunteers of your program comfortable working with the targeted population and familiar with their culture(s)?
2. How are your program activities and materials consistent with the traditions of participants?
3. Have representatives from the targeted cultural group reviewed the program materials and approaches for appropriateness?
Develop-mentally appropriate

Appropriate-ly timed

Socio-culturally relevant

Effective programs...
Talk amongst yourselves
Questions to consider

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Good relationships are critical

Well-trained and committed staff
Good relationships are critical
Questions to consider

1. How supportive, safe and comfortable do program participants feel while participating in your program?
2. Are staff and volunteers respectful of participants and each other?
3. How can positive relationships among participants, volunteers and staff be fostered?
Well-trained and committed staff
Questions to consider

1. To what extent are staff members and volunteers given adequate training before implementing or becoming involved in your program?
2. How regularly do staff members and/or volunteers meet to discuss and reflect on the program?
3. What is the rate of turnover among staff or volunteers?
4. How often do staff and volunteers receive guidance and feedback from supervisors?
Effective programs...

- Good relationships are critical
- Well-trained and committed staff
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Program assessment and quality assurance

- Make sure the program is well documented
- Focus on evaluation and refinement
Make sure the program is well-documented

“The palest ink is better than the best memory. “
Chinese Proverb
Questions to consider

1. Is your program adequately documented so that others could implement or replicate it?
2. Do program staff and volunteers know what the program is supposed to accomplish and what each session or component involves?
3. How well do they understand the rationale underlying the program and its activities?
Focus on evaluation & refinement

Evaluation takes many forms
Questions to consider

1. What processes are in place to monitor how well your program is being implemented?
2. What evidence do you have that your program actually achieves its intended outcomes?
3. What is the quality of this evidence?
4. Are you collecting the information that key stakeholders want to know?
5. What type of evaluation would be most appropriate for the current stage of your program?
Program assessment and quality assurance

Effective programs...

Are well documented

Focus on evaluation and refinement
Questions to consider

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The EIPI Process:

Making EIPI work for you
Conducting the EIPI Process

- Assemble a group of stakeholders
  - Program staff and volunteers
  - Past or current participants
  - Board members
  - Funders
  - Colleagues with expertise
  - External consultants
Conducting the EIPI Process

- Schedule adequate time to prepare for and implement the process
  - Gather information about the program
  - Create a program logic model if one does not exist
Conducting the EIPI Process

☐ Apply the EIPI Program Assessment tool
  ▪ Discuss each principle and how well your program meets it
  ▪ Gather additional information as needed
  ▪ Identify weaknesses and strengths
Conducting the EIPI Process

- Gather information for program improvement
  - Find research on which risk and protective factors and assets to target
  - Learn about evidence-based programs that are similar to your program
  - Review principles of effective programs for your specific program type
  - Seek out *What Works, Wisconsin Fact Sheets* and other sources
  - Re-examine how well your program meets the EIPI principles
Conducting the EIPI Process

- Identify areas where program changes are needed
  - Set reasonable program improvement goals
  - Develop a plan of action
  - Assign responsibilities for actions
  - Regularly check back with your action plan; adjust as necessary
Conducting the EIPI Process

- Repeat the process as part of your program’s quality assessment cycle
What Works, Wisconsin is a project of the University of Wisconsin-Madison's School of Human Ecology and the University of Wisconsin-Extension's Family Living Program. Initiated in 2004, the What Works project focuses on distilling the latest scientific knowledge on effective policies, practices, and programs, including "evidence-based programs," for youth and their families, schools, and communities. In addition to disseminating this information to practitioners and policymakers, the What Works staff provide technical assistance on program design, improvement and evaluation. Through publications, presentations, workshops and individualized technical assistance, the What Works team provides practitioners and policymakers with the tools to develop effective programs and evaluate and improve existing programming based on state-of-the-art knowledge of what makes programs effective.

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Evidence-informed program improvement

WHAT WORKS, WISCONSIN PROGRAM IMPROVEMENT MANUAL

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University of Wisconsin–Madison/Extension
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An introduction to the process

Learning from evidence-based programs 2
The evidence-informed program improvement process 3
Gathering information for program improvement 4
Using the Program Assessment Tool 4
After completing the Program Assessment Tool 5
Evidence-Informed Program Improvement: Using Principles of Effectiveness to Enhance the Quality and Impact of Family-Based Prevention Programs

In recent years, federal, state, and local governments and other funding organizations have increased pressure for greater effectiveness and through rigorous, peer-reviewed evaluations and have been endorsed by government agencies and well-respected research organizations. EBPs are
What Works, Wisconsin Fact Sheets

Each of these fact sheets provide a brief summary of what research tells us about effective programming in a specific area. They can be used as part of the Evidence-Informed Program Improvement process discussed in the EIP Process Improvement Manual or simply as a way to learn more about what the research says about effective practices and strategies for particular types of programs.

- Juvenile offender interventions
- Mentoring programs
- Out-of-school time programs
- Parenting education programs
- Truancy prevention and intervention
The Majority of the programs listed have received the highest rating in terms of scientific rigor and replication of evaluations by the program registries from which they have been assembled. In other words, they have been proven to produce specific results in relation to specific types of problems for a specific age group of individuals. However, that proof rests on their continued use in the manner for which they have been tested.

A screwdriver which has been proven to turn a Phillip’s head screw is not necessarily effective when used on a flat head screw, much less when appropriated as a hammer to pound in a nail. A program which is intended for parents with children displaying early indications of conduct disorder cannot be used for parents who are recovering drug addicts. Nor can a parenting component which appropriated from a multi-component program necessarily be expected to be effective which used on its own.

Registries from which the programs have been chosen:
- The California Evidence-Based Clearinghouse for Child Welfare (CEBC)
  http://www.cebc4cw.org/
- Center for the Study of Prevention of Violence: Blueprints for Violence Prevention (blueprints)
  http://www.colorado.edu/wvblueprints/
- Helping America’s Youth (HAY)
  http://www.findyouthinfo.gov/
- Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention Model Programs Guide (OJJDP)
  http://www.dsgonline.com/mpg_index.htm
- Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration’s National Registry of Evidence-Based Programs and Practices (SAMHSA)
  http://nrepp.samhsa.gov/
http://whatworks.uwex.edu
Questions?