

# **What Makes a Good Parenting Program Good?**

**According to research.....**

**COMPREHENSIVE – TAKES A HOLISTIC APPROACH**

**LONG TERM – STAYS WITH FAMILY OVER TIME**

**FAMILY-FOCUSED, NOT CHILD OR PARENT FOCUSED**

**SUFFICIENT TIME – CONTAINS 30-40 CONTACT HOURS**

**CULTURALLY SENSITIVE**

**DEVELOPMENTALLY APPROPRIATE (TO FAMILY)**

**ADDRESSES FAMILY DYNAMICS AND ENVIRONMENT**

**PROVIDES BOOSTER CLASSES OR ONGOING SUPPORT GROUPS**

**STRESSES PARENT-CHILD RELATIONSHIP FIRST**

**REMOVES BARRIERS TO ATTENDANCE**

**NON-THREATENING ENVIRONMENT**

**CARING, TRAINED PROFESSIONAL STAFF**

**USES VIDEOS SHOWING POSITIVE AND NEGATIVE PARENTING**

## What Makes a Good Parenting Program Good?

Reviews of research on the effectiveness of parent training programs suggest there is no one single best family intervention program, and providers in the field must carefully select the best program for their target population. Following is a listing of principles useful in reviewing and selecting family programs for implementation.

- ✓ **Comprehensive interventions** are more effective in modifying risk or protective factors in children. Interventions that address the entire range of developmental outcomes of the child (i.e., cognitive, behavioral, social, emotional, physical, and spiritual) through improvements in all environmental domains (i.e., society/culture, community/ neighborhood, school, peer group, and family/extended family) demonstrate increased effectiveness. Many programs are effective in the areas they target for changes in youth, parents, or families, but many focus too narrowly and hence have more limited results. (Kumpfer, 1997)
- ✓ **Family-focused programs** are more effective than child-focused or parent-focused only. A number of early childhood education studies have shown that comprehensive, holistic, family-focused programs are the current best practice and should be the central target for program development. (Mitchell, Weiss & Shultz, 2000)
- ✓ Family programs should be **long-term and enduring**. Short-term interventions with high risk or in-crisis families are only band aids, and do not result in long term solutions. Although recruitment for long term programs can be very difficult, once high-risk families are involved in a family intervention, they often do not want to terminate participation. (Kumpfer, 1999)
- ✓ **Sufficient time** must be spent with families in order to make a difference. The needier the family is in terms of number of risk factors/processes, the more time is needed to help the family change. Time must be allowed for developing trust, helping the family to determine its needs, providing or locating support services for basic needs, among other tasks. Research shows that at least 30-40 contact hours are needed for a positive and lasting impact of family programs, particularly because high-risk families frequently miss sessions and have difficulty implementing the skills taught at home (Kumpfer & Alvarado, 1995; Kumpfer & DeMarsh, 1985).
- ✓ **Culturally sensitive** - Tailoring the parent training to the cultural traditions of the families involved improves recruitment, retention, and outcome effectiveness. Understanding the cultural parenting assumptions of different ethnic groups participating in the parenting or family programs improves program success (Catalano, et.al., 1993, Kumpfer & Alvarado, 1995).
- ✓ Addressing **developmentally-appropriate** risk and protective factors or processes at times of family need, when participants are receptive to change is important. Occasionally, a very short-term program can have high impact on participants if the material covered exactly addresses a few major needs of the parent or child. In addition, research demonstrates that interventions are most effective if the participants are ready for change process (Spoth & Redmond, 1996).

- ✓ Family programs are most enduring in effectiveness if they produce changes in the ongoing **family dynamics and environment**. There is suggestive evidence that family programs that encourage families to hold *family meetings* weekly after the program ends have the longest effectiveness, because they change the internal family organization and communication patterns of the family in positive and enduring ways (Catalano, Haggerty, Fleming, & Brewer, 1996; Kumpfer, 1996a).
- ✓ **Improving parenting skills** produces an ongoing intervention that is more effective over time than short-term interventions with children or adolescents only (McMahon, 1996). Effectiveness of family interventions decay gradually with time (Harrison & Proschauer, 1995), but probably can be strengthened with new developmentally-appropriate booster sessions as recommended by Botvin (1995).
- ✓ Effective programs start first with **improving the parent/child relationship** and then focus on family communication and parent monitoring and discipline (Kumpfer, 1996b).
- ✓ High rates of recruitment and retention are possible with families. Although many family intervention providers have a very poor turnout for their first attempts at implementing family programs, with increasing experience the retention rates can generally be significantly improved if **barriers to attendance are reduced**. An 80% to 85% retention rate is possible for most programs if transportation, meals or snacks, and child-care are provided (Aktan, 1995). Recruitment rates will vary with the type of program, incentives, types of clients targeted and time of day offered (Spoth & Redmond, 1996b).
- ✓ The parent support program should be located in a **non-threatening environment** and provided by **sensitive, trained, and caring professional staff** members. While program length may be an issue in recruiting families, it is generally not an issue in retention, because many families do not want the program to end once they have attended more than three or four sessions. An ongoing parent support group or booster sessions can help address this need for continuation of the program. The **effectiveness of the program is highly tied to the trainer's personal efficacy** and characteristics. Although little data exists on how much of the effectiveness of a family program is due to the trainer versus the standardized curriculum, estimates range from 50% to 80%. Parent trainers with backgrounds in the type of program being implemented are best. Staff who share the same general philosophy and background as the program is promoting are most effective. Personal, caring, empathetic and experienced staff members are rated the highest by the program participants, retain families better, and produce better results. (Aktan, 1995).
- ✓ **Videos** of families demonstrating good and poor parenting skills help with program effectiveness and client satisfaction. Video tape vignettes and video-based programs are demonstrating significant long-term program effectiveness (Webster-Stratton, 1990a; Webster-Stratton, 1996).