

Parents as Teachers' Impact on Health

There is a growing recognition that home visiting is an effective strategy for improving health outcomes for young children.¹ Home visitors bring a critical understanding of how a family's culture and values impact parenting and health practices, and provide motivation to address possible needed changes.

Parents as Teachers' approach to health.

Parents as Teachers is an evidence-based home visiting model designed to provide the information, support and encouragement parents need to help their children develop optimally during the crucial early years of life. Parents as Teachers serves families throughout pregnancy until their child finishes kindergarten, working with parents to improve parenting practices and to promote healthy child development and school readiness and school success.

The Parents as Teachers approach emphasizes and addresses family well-being. Family well-being can have a long-term impact on a child's health well into adulthood. The Adverse Children Experience (ACEs) Study is one of the largest ever conducted to determine how negative experiences from childhood can impact a person's health and well-being over the lifespan. The results of the study show that early childhood exposure to traumatic events – such as child abuse, neglect, witnessing a parent being abused, parental substance abuse, experiencing divorce, having an incarcerated parent or having a parent with mental health issues – leads to poor health outcomes for those children when they become adults.² By addressing family well-being, Parents as Teachers helps prevent or reduce the impact of negative early experiences on children and contributes to better health and well-being outcomes for children and parents.

Parents as Teachers prevents child abuse and neglect.

- In a randomized trial in four counties in Southern California, adolescent mothers who received case management and Parents as Teachers were significantly less likely to be subjected to child abuse investigations than control group mothers who received neither case management nor Parents as Teachers.³



- In another randomized trial, adolescent mothers in an urban community who participated in Parents as Teachers scored lower on a child maltreatment precursor scale than mothers in the control group. These adolescent mothers showed greater improvement in knowledge of discipline, showed more positive involvement with children, and organized their home environment in a way more conducive to child development.⁴
- Parents as Teachers families had fewer documented cases of abuse and neglect in comparison to the Missouri state average.⁵
- A Parenting Reflection Survey designed to measure the change in parents' knowledge and skills before and after the Parents as Teachers program is administered annually. Recent findings show a 20% increase in the percentage of parents agreeing with the following statement "I make my home safe for my child" before (78%) and after (98%) the Parents as Teachers program. Similarly, there was a 38% increase in the percentage of parents agreeing with the following statement "I am able to deal with the stresses of parenting and life in general" before (52%) and after (90%) the Parents as Teachers program.⁶



Parents as Teachers improves child and parent health and development outcomes.

Child Outcomes

- A Building Healthy Children collaborative in Rochester, New York studied Parents as Teachers services offered in treatment families along with child-parent psychotherapy, and interpersonal psychotherapy which revealed that treatment children had a significantly higher (98%) compliance with the well-child visit completion rate compared with 90% for children in the control group,⁷ based on American Academy of Pediatrics Recommendations for Preventive Health Care schedule of well-child visit.⁸
- Annual health and developmental screenings are a core component of Parents as Teachers. Of the 106,000 plus children screened in the most recent program year, 15% were identified with possible health/developmental delays and were referred on for additional follow up services, and 60% of those referred received follow-up services.⁹
- In two separate studies, children participating in Parents as Teachers were much more likely to be fully immunized for their given age,^{4,7} and one study showed children in Parents as Teachers were less likely to be treated for an injury in the previous year.⁴
- More than one-half of the Parents as Teachers children observed with developmental delays overcame these delays by age 3.⁵



Parent Outcomes

- A health literacy demonstration project conducted with Parents as Teachers programs in the bootheel area of Missouri found significant improvements occurred in the following Health Care Literacy indicators: Use of Information, Use of Prenatal Care, Child Well Care, Child Sick Care, Child Dental Care, and Child Immunizations; and in these Self-Care indicators: Use of Resources, Family Planning, Relationship with the Parent Educator.¹⁰
- Based on the analysis of surveys from 355 Parents as Teachers programs serving teens, as the number of Parents as Teachers prenatal contacts increased, the percent of teens giving births to low birth weight babies decreased. While 5.3% of the teen mothers with 1-3 Parents as Teachers prenatal contacts gave birth to low weight babies, 2.5% with 7 or more Parents as Teachers prenatal contacts had low birth weight babies.¹¹
- A recent review of data from the U.S. Fragile Families and Child Well-being study indicates that the amount of support a mother receives impacts not only her own health but also extends to impact her children's overall health.¹² A Parenting Reflection Survey designed to measure the change in parents' knowledge and skills showed that parents agreeing with the following statement "I feel supported as a parent" increased before (75%) and after (91%) the Parents as Teachers program.¹¹
- In a randomized trial in Northern California, results showed that participation in Parents as Teachers by Spanish-speaking Latino families benefited them significantly in the area of self-help development.³



References

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