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Prevention of Child Abuse and Neglect

Parents as Teachers: Partnering with parents to keep their children safe

Although varying across states, the national (including the District of Columbia and the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico) rate of child abuse and neglect in 2022 was 7.7 per 1000 children. Data indicate children under 1 year old have by far the highest death rate from child abuse and neglect among children ages 1-17.¹ Almost one-third of all victims of child abuse are younger than 3 years old, and in 2022, more than 70% of all child abuse and neglect victims that died were younger than 3.¹ The brain is particularly vulnerable to trauma during the early childhood years, and in an environment of abuse or neglect, children aren't able to learn, grow, and develop to their full potential. Extreme or "toxic" stress and environmental factors such as poverty, neighborhood crime and a lack of community resources make parenting even harder for families.



Among its recommendations for preventing child abuse and neglect, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) lists the strategy of "enhance parentings skills to promote healthy child development".² The CDC's Task Force on Community Preventive Services performed a comprehensive review of the home visiting literature and found that home visiting programs reduced child abuse and neglect by approximately 40% as compared to control groups not receiving home visiting services.³ The early childhood years mark a sensitive time for brain development and are a crucial time for strengthening a parent's understanding of the critical role of parenting, the essential opportunities for promoting healthy child development, and the consequences of trauma on a child's formative years. **Communities can stop child abuse in its tracks by investing in a solution that works: home visiting.**



My parent educator was the first positive influence in my life

"I didn't know what good parenting looked like until I started working with a parent educator from Parents as Teachers. As a child, my mom went back and forth from being too lax, to overly strict. If I got in trouble, my discipline was getting punched in the face. My friends aren't good parents, either, and drugs have been a big part of that. My parent educator was the first positive influence in my life. I know she will come to the house every couple weeks and I am motivated to be a better parent because she has shown me how. She taught me to be consistent and how to discipline without spanking or shouting. She also supports my sobriety. She brings me books to read to my child and taught me how to read to her, and I know that makes a difference in her school readiness skills. In my own life, my parent educator encouraged me to build relationships that resulted in my regaining employment. I have made a lot of mistakes in my life but being a good mom and helping my child develop to her full potential will not be one of them."

— Sharon, Centralia, Parents as Teachers program participant

Promoting skills and positive parenting behaviors

- Participants in Parents as Teachers experienced significant increases in two domains of protective factors, including social connections and overall Parenting Assessment of Protective Factors (PAPF) score.⁴
- Adolescent mothers in an urban community who participated in Parents as Teachers scored lower on a child maltreatment precursor scale than control group mothers. Parents as Teachers mothers also showed increased knowledge of discipline, had more positive involvement with their children, and organized their home environment in a way more conducive to child development.⁵
- Findings from a 2014 Parenting Reflection survey showed 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%) participating in 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
- Families receiving Parents as Teachers services in an Arizona randomized controlled trial (RCT) show significant improvements in parenting efficacy, hope, and all seven safety practices measured by the Home Safety Scale were documented at significantly higher rates at 6- and 12-months. Parents as Teachers parents also had significantly lower risk scores, a measure of depression and parenting stress, at 6 months.⁷

From Research to Policy and Practice

The 2018 Family First Prevention Services Act (FFPSA) authorizes optional funding for time-limited prevention services aimed at enhancing support services for families to help children who are candidates for foster care, pregnant or parenting youth in foster care, and the parents or kin caregivers of those children and youth. The law enables states and territories to use funds for prevention services including in-home parent skill-based programs such as home visiting.

For more information about Family First in your state, contact Benjamin Hazelton at benjamin.hazelton@parentsasteachers.org.

Reducing and preventing instances of child abuse and neglect

- Parents as Teachers families were less likely to have any maltreatment reports between study entry and when the child turned 15 months old.⁸
- In a RCT 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.⁹
- In a RCT of Parents as Teachers for families involved with Child Protective Services (CPS), program participation was associated with a significantly lower likelihood of CPS involvement for non-depressed mothers.¹⁰
- In one of the largest research studies in the U.S. investigating the impact of home visiting on child maltreatment, researchers found a 22% decreased likelihood of substantiated cases of child

maltreatment (as reported by CPS) for Parents as Teachers families compared to families not receiving Parents as Teachers.¹¹

- Parents as Teachers in Maine focusing on families with involvement with CPS found that once enrolled in a Parents as Teachers program, 95% of families had no further substantiated reports or allegations of child abuse or neglect.¹²
- In South Carolina, children in Parents as Teachers were 67% less likely to have a founded maltreatment report than those not in Parents as Teachers.¹³ 2.5% of children enrolled in Parents as Teachers had a founded maltreatment report after their first home visit, compared to 7.1% of children not enrolled in Parents as Teachers.¹³

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