Getting Ready: the Effects of a Relationship-Focused Intervention on Parent Engagement in Early Head Start Families

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The Getting Ready intervention is an integrated, multi-systemic, ecologically-based intervention that promotes school readiness through enhancing parent engagement for children from birth to age five.

The model is focused on supporting the dyadic parent-child relationship, and an exchange of ideas and developmentally-appropriate expectations for children between parents and early childhood professionals (ECPs) (Sheridan, Marvin, Knoche, & Edwards, 2008).

Professionals are trained to use Triadic (McCollum & Yates, 1994) and collaborative (Sheridan & Kratochwill, 2008) strategies in their work with families.
Parent Engagement

- **Parent engagement with children** includes:
  - warmth, sensitivity, and responsiveness;
  - support for a child’s emerging autonomy;
  - active and meaningful participation in learning.

- **Parent engagement with professionals** includes interactions that:
  - support families in enhancing the “curriculum of the home”;
  - help children and families navigate the transition from home to school.
Summary of Research

- Data from our work to date indicate that the **Getting Ready Intervention is effective** at supporting:
  - social-emotional competencies in preschool children (Sheridan et al., 2009);
  - language and literacy skills in preschool children (Sheridan et al., in submission).

- Data also indicate that the Getting Ready Intervention is being implemented with fidelity as evidenced by the observed behaviors of home visitors and teachers in their interactions with families (Edwards et al., 2009; Knoche et al., 2010).
What are the effects of the Getting Ready Intervention on the parenting behaviors of Early Head Start families?
Sample

Early Head Start Families (N=242) in rural communities in Midwestern state.

Ethnicity/Race
- 62% White/Non-Hispanic
- 35% Hispanic/Latino
- 3% Other

Parental Education
- 42% Less than High School Diploma
- 30% High School Diploma/GED
- 24% Some Training Beyond High School but not College Degree
- 4% College Degree

Parent Age: 25 years

Child Age (baseline): 11 months (2 – 31 months)

Intervention primarily conducted during Early Head Start home visits held weekly.
Video-taped parent/child observational data were collected in individualized assessment sessions every four months for a period of up to 16 months (five assessment sessions).

Observational data were coded using the Parent/Caregiver Involvement Scale (P/CIS; Farran, Kasari, Comfort, & Jay, 1986).

Six factors used in analyses; four significant treatment effects:

- Warmth & Sensitivity – Quality
- Support for Learning – Quality
- Encouragement of Autonomy – Quality
- Support for Learning – Appropriateness
- Guidance/Directives – Appropriateness
- Constructive Behaviors – Amount
Parents in the Getting Ready treatment group interacted with their children using a greater degree of warmth and sensitivity than their counterparts in the control condition. They demonstrated high-quality, positive, sensitive interactions with their children.

(P/CIS items: physical involvement, responsiveness of caregiver, play interaction, directives/demands, positive statements, negative statement)
Compared to parents in the control condition, parents who were involved in the Getting Ready intervention demonstrated more skills to support their children’s autonomy. That is, parents involved in the intervention were sensitive to the types of goals they set for their children, and used quality approaches to control children’s activities.

(P/CIS items: goal setting, control of activities)
Parents in the treatment group provided more appropriate supports for their children’s learning than the supports offered by parents in the control group. Parents in the treatment group provided fitting supports for their children, including appropriate teaching behaviors, verbal interactions and responsiveness.

(P/CIS items: verbal involvement, responsiveness of caregiver, negative statements, relationship among activities, teaching behavior, play interaction, physical involvement)
Parents in the treatment group were observed to provide more appropriate guidance and directives for their children than the parents in the control group. The behaviors used by these families to direct their children’s behaviors were well-matched to the children’s developmental level, interest and needs. 

(P/CIS items: directives/demands, goal setting, control of activities, positive statements)
Implications

- The triadic and collaborative strategies that comprise the Getting Ready intervention were intended to support parent’s *competence and confidence* in their interactions with their children and with their home visitor. The findings from this study suggest that the intervention model was effective at accomplishing this objective.

- Existing research indicates that Early Head Start programming improves some aspects of parenting behaviors; the Getting Ready intervention offers value added in the dimensions of *warmth and sensitivity, encouragement of autonomy, support for learning* and the *appropriateness of guidance and directives offered by parents*.

- In combination with the significant changes in child outcomes for preschool and implementation data, we are encouraged with these findings that indicate the effectiveness of the Getting Ready intervention on parent behaviors.
  - Collective findings to date could suggest a differential effect of the intervention based on developmental period.