

# Reducing Stress Experienced by Young Parents

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## Abstract

High stress levels are associated with dysfunctional parenting behavior and negative interactions between parents and their child. Teenage parents, in particular, face high levels of stress as they try to cope with their new role. FAST Babies is a multi-family group prevention program for young parents and their infants (0-3) specifically designed to build protective and reduce risk factors in order to provide children of young mothers with the opportunity to reach their full potential. The program involves the infant, the young parents, as well as the grandmother, and program activities stress experiential learning, and practice taking responsibility for the baby through repeated communication rehearsals.

## FAST Babies Program Goals

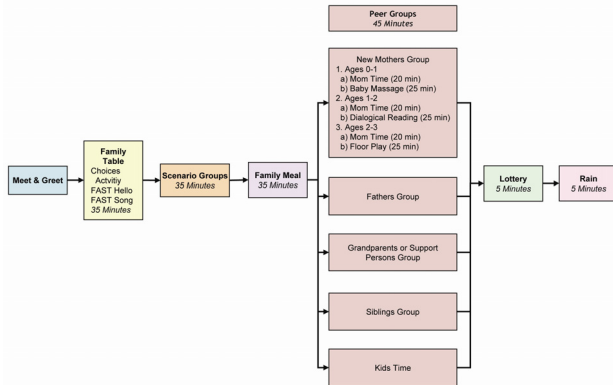
- Enhance family functioning.
- Strengthen Infant Development
- Prevent substance abuse, depression, and domestic violence
- Reduce the stress and social isolation that teen parents and grandparents experience from daily life situations

## Evaluation

The FAST Babies evaluation consists of a pre- and post-test completed by the young mothers. The instrument includes:

- Social Support Scale (Sherbourne & Stewart, 1991)
- Family Environment Scale (Moos & Moos, 1986)
- Parenting Stress Index (Abidin, 1995)
- Stress Index of Parents of Adolescents (Sheras & Abidin, 1998)
- Self-Efficacy Scale (Scherer, et al., 1983)

## Program Activities



## FAST Babies Participants

616 families completed the program

### Age Range of Participants:

- **Young Mothers:** range 12-37 years, mean = 19.1 years (SD=2.00)
- **Babies:** range 0-60 months, mean = 7.9 months (SD=8.13)

### Race/Ethnicity:

	Mothers Frequency	Valid %	Babies Frequency	Valid %
White	292	50.2	254	44.3
Black	104	17.9	94	16.4
Hispanic/Latino	88	15.1	73	12.7
American Indian/Native American	37	6.4	33	5.7
Mixed Ethnicity	31	5.3	91	15.9
Other	11	1.9	13	2.3
Alaskan native	11	1.9	9	1.6
Asian or Pacific Islander	8	1.4	7	1.2
Total Reporting	582	100.0	574	100.0

### Highest Grade Completed:

	Frequency	%
Grades 1 through 8 (elementary)	40	7.0
Some high school	314	54.8
High school graduate or GED	144	25.1
Junior or vocational college	16	2.8
Some college (not junior/vocational)	43	7.5
College graduate	10	1.7
Some graduate or professional school	2	0.3
Graduate/professional school degree	4	0.7
Total Reporting	573	100.0

### Total Income in Last Year:

	Frequency	%
Less than \$5,000	135	28.2
\$5,000-\$9,999	83	17.4
\$10,000-\$14,999	83	17.4
\$15,000-\$24,999	58	12.1
\$25,000-\$34,999	53	11.1
\$35,000-\$49,999	29	6.1
\$50,000-\$74,999	18	3.8
\$75,000-\$99,999	12	2.5
\$100,000 or more	7	1.5
Total Reporting	478	100.0

### Marital Status:

	Frequency	%
Never been married	297	51.9
Member of unmarried couple	297	31.5
Married	48	8.4
Separated	41	7.2
Widowed	2	0.3
Total Reporting	572	100.0

### Employment Status:

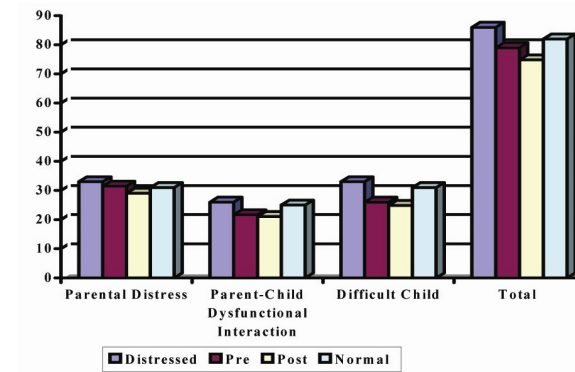
	Frequency	%
Student	220	38.8
Unemployed, looking for work	124	21.9
Not employed outside the home	70	12.3
Full time job	67	11.8
Part time job	66	11.6
Disabled, unable to work	19	3.4
Retired	1	0.2
Total Reporting	567	100.0

## Outcome Data

### Parenting Stress Index

	N	Pre Mean	SD	Post Mean	SD	p-value
Parental Distress	419	31.49	8.79	29.03	8.53	.000
Parent-Child Dysfunctional Interaction	406	21.65	7.69	21.06	7.61	.055
Difficult Child	385	25.98	8.33	24.87	7.95	.002
Total Parenting Stress	367	78.97	20.38	74.82	20.50	.000

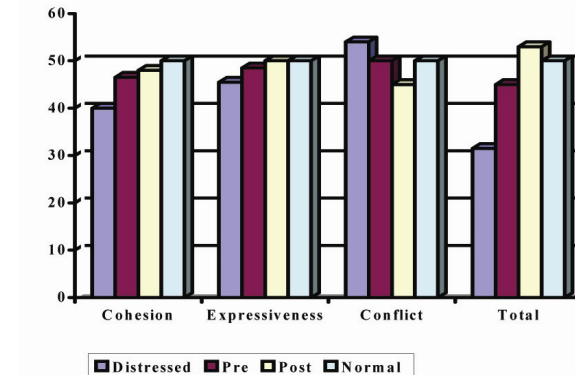
Figure 1. Parenting Stress Index



### Family Environment Scale

	N	Pre Mean	SD	Post Mean	SD	p-value
Cohesion	506	6.31	2.26	6.55	2.20	.007
Expressiveness	506	5.22	1.93	5.50	1.89	.001
Conflict	505	3.18	2.33	2.93	2.25	.002
Total Family Relationships	503	8.36	5.19	9.10	5.11	.000

Figure 2. Family Environment Scale



### Community Social Relationships

	N	Pre Mean	SD	Post Mean	SD	p-value
Community Social Relationships	403	7.41	1.48	7.72	1.51	.000
Relationship with Baby	469	8.53	1.41	8.90	1.16	.000
Total Social Relationships	460	7.73	1.30	8.06	1.25	.000

### Reciprocal Support

	N	Pre Mean	SD	Post Mean	SD	p-value
Support Received from Others	501	3.44	1.21	3.58	1.14	.002
Support Given to Others	492	3.56	1.07	3.67	1.00	.009

### Self-Efficacy

	N	Pre Mean	SD	Post Mean	SD	p-value
General Self-Efficacy	470	3.52	0.58	3.55	0.59	.073
Social Self-Efficacy	483	3.26	0.63	3.31	0.60	.016
Nurturance Efficacy	443	4.24	0.59	4.19	0.70	.060

### Social Support

	N	Pre Mean	SD	Post Mean	SD	p-value
Tangible Support	505	2.27	0.73	2.24	0.77	.124
Affectionate Support	506	2.42	0.76	2.44	0.77	.232
Emotional Support	504	2.21	0.76	2.26	0.77	.035
Total Support	503	2.28	0.67	2.30	0.70	.212

## Findings

Following the eight week program, young mothers report significant improvements in parental distress (distress a parent is experiencing in his or her role as parent as a function of personal factors that are directly related to parenting), parent-child dysfunctional interaction (the parent's perception that the child does not meet the parent's expectations), the parent's perception of the child (behavioral characteristics of children that make them either easy or difficult to manage), and a decrease in total parenting stress. Young mothers also report statistically significant improvements in family cohesion, community social relationships, relationships with their infant, total social relationships, support received and given to others, social self-efficacy, and emotional support.

## Conclusion

FAST Babies can help young parents reduce their stress level, improve family relationships, and promote a healthier family environment for the baby.