

Reducing Teenage Parents' Stress



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INTRODUCTION

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. Baby FAST is a program for teenage parents designed to help the young parent cope with her/his new responsibility. It is often used to supplement home visitations for isolated and at risk families. Weekly meetings take place for 10 weeks and include the teen parent's support person (often the mother), and the father. The program focuses on building social support for teen parents, improving the relationships between the young parents and the support person, and reducing the stress experienced by the young parent which is known to contribute to child abuse and neglect. Parents learn to share problem solving and baby care habits and techniques, establish roles and family management rules, find help for specific needs, and connect with parents, schools, and community services. FAST is implemented by a team that includes a health nurse, an occupational therapist or baby massage therapist, mental health specialist, young mother and young father leaders, mother or father of a teenage parent, and a father specialist. Activities include scenario building, intergeneration resolution sharing, baby massage instructions, floor play, dialogic reading, and father coaching and interaction. The FAST program was created by Dr. Lynn McDonald, a Professor at Middlesex University.

EVALUATION

The FAST Babies evaluation consists of a retrospective 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

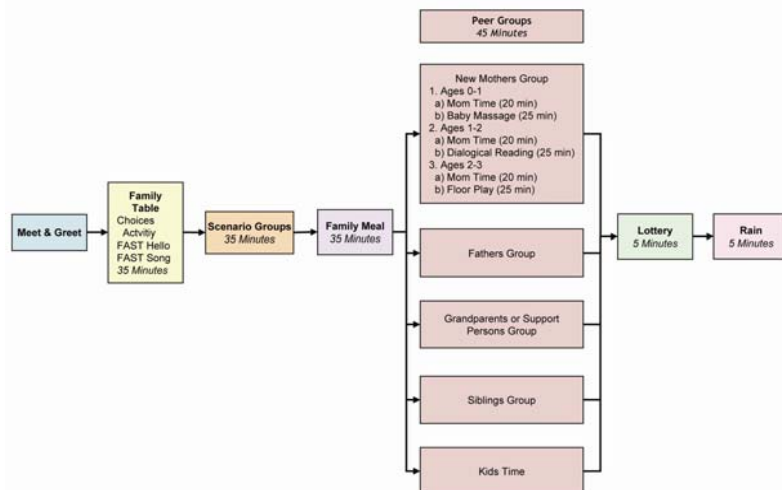
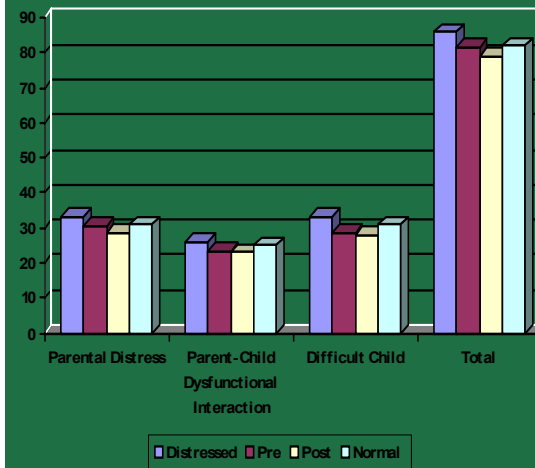


Figure 1

Parenting Stress Index



	N	Pre Mean	SD	Post Mean	SD	P-value
Family Environment Scale						
Cohesion	355	6.24	2.36	6.54	2.19	.002
Expressiveness	354	5.00	1.94	5.26	1.88	.004
Conflict	354	3.27	2.40	2.97	2.30	.002
Total Family Relationships	353	7.99	5.36	8.84	5.06	.000
Community Social Relationships						
Community Social Relationships	319	7.38	1.49	7.76	1.52	.000
Relationship with Baby	308	8.59	1.35	8.90	1.18	.000
Total Social Relationships	304	7.70	1.28	8.05	1.28	.000
Reciprocal Support						
Support Received from Others	346	3.58	1.16	3.74	1.07	.001
Support Given to Others	340	3.63	1.09	3.74	1.02	.012
Self-Efficacy						
General Self-Efficacy	333	3.57	0.59	3.62	0.58	.047
Social Self-Efficacy	334	3.29	0.64	3.32	0.57	.120
Nurturance Efficacy	294	4.22	0.63	4.19	0.72	.240
Social Support						
Tangible Support	350	2.36	0.69	2.33	0.73	.181
Affectionate Support	351	2.47	0.70	2.52	0.72	.082
Emotional Support	339	2.30	0.76	2.37	0.70	.027
Total Support	349	2.33	0.64	2.38	0.67	.062

Demographics
Age (n=408)

Mothers: range 12-19 years, mean: 17.3 years (SD=1.4)
Babies: range 0-91 months, mean: 6.0 months(SD=9.5)

Mother's Race/Ethnicity (n=408)	%
White	40.9
Black	26.5
Hispanic/Latino	16.2
Native American	7.6
Asian or Pacific Islander	0.2
Other	2.2
Mixed Ethnicity	6.4
Marital Status (n=398)	%
Never been married	56.3
Member of unmarried couple	32.9
Married	3.5
Separated	7.0
Employment Status (n=399)	%
Student	52.9
Unemployed, looking for work	20.6
Full time job	7.3
Part time job	11.3
Not employed outside the home	7.0
Total Income in Last Year (n=305)	%
Less than \$10,000	48.9
\$10,000-\$24,999	25.6
\$25,000-\$49,999	17.1
\$50,000 or more	8.5



FINDINGS

Following the ten week program, young mothers report significant improvements in the ten:

- parental distress;
- total parenting stress;
- family relationships: cohesion, expressiveness, conflict;
- community social relationships;
- relationship with the baby;
- support received and given to others;
- general self-efficacy; and
- emotional support received from others.

CONCLUSION

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

References

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McDonald, L., Billingham, T., Conrad, P., Morgan, A. O., N., & Payton, E. (1997). Families and Schools Together (FAST): Integrating community development with clinical strategy. *Families in Society, (March/April)*, 140-155.

Abt Associates (1999). Report on FAST. Boston, Massachusetts.

Findings

	N	Pre Mean	SD	Post Mean	SD	P-value
Parenting Stress Index						
Parental Distress	275	30.55	8.90	28.72	8.48	.000
Parent-Child Dysfunctional Interaction	257	23.32	7.16	22.96	7.32	.160
Difficult Child	244	28.49	7.21	27.93	6.98	.081
Total Parenting Stress	228	81.74	18.48	78.93	18.80	.002