

Statewide Study Shows Improved Child Safety

with the *Nurturing Parenting Program*[®] and the Potential for Significant Savings to Child Welfare

Overview

Casey Family Programs is a national operating foundation committed to improving the lives of children and families. The foundation supports the efforts of child welfare agencies to prevent abuse and neglect, and to find safe and permanent families for children in foster care.

The Nurturing Parenting Program[®] (*NPP*) for Infants, Toddlers, and Preschoolers is a parenting education program with some evidence to support its use in child welfare. The *NPP* is built on the principle that knowledge and empathy are the foundation of responsive parenting. Promoting nurturing and empathic parenting practices is critical to the safety and well-being of children. The program is designed to prevent maltreatment by developing the nurturing skills of caregivers of young children. Given the strategic goal of Casey Family Programs to safely reduce the need for foster care and contribute to the knowledge of 'what works' in child welfare, the foundation collaborated with Louisiana's Department of Social Services in evaluating this program.

In this study of the statewide implementation of the *NPP*, we analyzed data from 528 Louisiana caregivers with children under 6 years old who had child abuse and/or neglect allegations. Caregivers participated in a 16-week, group-based program that was supplemented by home visits in some instances. Caregivers focused on self-awareness and empowerment, empathy for their children's needs, child development, discipline, emotional communication, behavioral skills, family routines, and decision-making to promote child safety.



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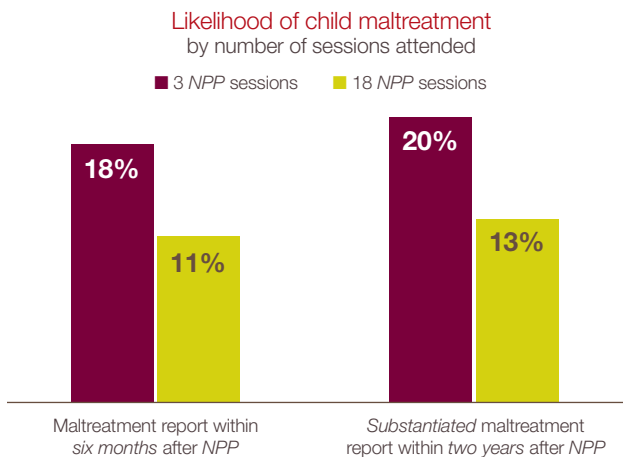


Results: Improved Child Safety

Results demonstrate that participation in the *NPP* was associated with a reduction in short-term allegations and longer-term substantiated child maltreatment incidences. The more sessions caregivers attended, the more child safety improved, as measured by a recurrence of maltreatment reports.

- Six months after the program's conclusion, caregivers who attended more sessions were significantly less likely to be re-reported for child maltreatment.
- Two years after participating, caregivers who attended more sessions were significantly less likely to have a *substantiated* maltreatment incidence.

The chart below presents the likelihood of a repeat maltreatment report for an 'average' caregiver at two illustrative levels of program participation – the average number of group and home-visiting sessions (18) vs. the 10th percentile (3). We report these for each time period and type of report with a significant association.



Note: Eighteen sessions is the average number of group and home-visiting sessions attended. Three sessions is the lowest decile.

In summary, program participation is associated with fewer short-term allegations and fewer longer-term substantiated incidences of maltreatment.¹ These results suggest that moving to evidence-informed parenting education, such as the *NPP*, may improve safety outcomes for children and reduce future child welfare involvement for families that have had previous contact with the system.

Cost Analysis

Results of a cost analysis from the perspective of the child welfare department show a benefit-to-cost ratio of 0.87. In other words, in the 4½-year time frame following participants during the first 2½ years of program implementation, the state child welfare agency could recoup at least 87 percent of the costs of delivering the *NPP* assuming average-to-high attendance levels. These savings stem from the direct costs associated with observed reductions in repeat maltreatment.

Despite the fact that some program expenses like supervision, rent, and other non-personnel costs were not included, savings would be substantially greater if other outcomes associated with the prevention of maltreatment were included, such as medical costs (hospitalizations, chronic health conditions, doctor visits, prescriptions), non-medical costs (judicial and criminal services, special education), and lost productivity (lost earnings).² In addition, we also did not include savings attributable to reductions in maltreatment from other child-serving agencies or systems, such as Medicaid.

This cost analysis demonstrates the significant potential of the *NPP* for producing long-term savings to child welfare agencies and society in general. Those savings then could be reinvested into additional prevention strategies and programs.

Implications of this research

In child welfare, parenting education interventions serve families that are trying to keep their children from entering out-of-home care or are seeking reunification. But the use of evidence-informed or evidence-based parenting education programs is scarce. This examination is one step along a continuum to establish parent education, and the *NPP* in particular, as a cost-effective strategy for serving the child welfare population.

Louisiana's policy shift toward evidence-informed programming, its statewide implementation and evaluation of the *NPP*, and the *NPP*'s potential to reduce ongoing child welfare involvement may have relevance for other jurisdictions interested in similar programmatic transformations of child welfare services.

¹ Maher, E. J., Marcynyszyn, L. A., Corwin, T., & Hodnett, R. (2011). Dosage matters: The relationship between participation in the Nurturing Parenting Program for infant, toddlers, and preschoolers and subsequent child maltreatment. *Children and Youth Services Review*, 33, 1426-1434.

² These studies are described in Corso, P. S. & Lutzker, J. (2006). The need for economic analysis in research on child maltreatment. *Child Abuse & Neglect*, 30(7), 727-738.

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