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Evaluating “Parent Project:”  
A Multi-Method, Multi-Site Inquiry

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### Abstract

This study reports on a mixed-method evaluation of Parent Project®, a parent education program for parents of at-risk adolescents. Results comparing pre-workshop data with week 8 data suggested significant increases in parent-reported parental support, parental behavioral control, and youth achievement, and significant decreases in youth antisocial behavior. Youth reported significant increases in maternal and paternal support and maternal behavioral control, and significant decreases in antisocial behaviors. In focus group interviews, parents mentioned that the program offered practical support, and that the skills taught were quite useful given the problems they were facing with their adolescents. Overall, parents reported feeling satisfied with the program.

**KEY WORDS:** At-risk Youth, Parent – Adolescent Relationships, Parent Education, Parenting, Program Evaluation

## Evaluating “Parent Project:”

### A Multi-Method, Multi-Site Inquiry

Much research suggests that parenting is linked with important child outcomes in a variety of areas. Specifically, children do best when parents support them, spend quality time with them, avoid harsh punishment, and emphasize communication (Amato & Fowler, 2002). Furthermore, research suggests that positive parenting is important during adolescence, not just during the early years. For example, Lamborn, Mounts, Steinberg, and Dornbusch (1991) indicated that adolescents who described their parents as authoritative scored higher on measures of psychosocial competence and lower on measures of psychological and behavioral dysfunction. Additionally, Barber, Stolz, and Olsen (2005) reported that parental support, behavioral control, and (a lack of) psychological control were consistently predictive of adolescent externalizing and internalizing behaviors across 11 diverse national-ethnic groups.

Due to the plethora of studies over the past three decades suggesting the critical role of parents in children’s lives, there has been an increase in the number of parent education programs available in the United States (Barlow & Brown, 2001). While it is encouraging that so many programs are now available to help parents acquire the skills that might, in the end, benefit their children, it is very important that these programs are subjected to rigorous evaluation. The purpose of the present study, therefore, is to provide a quantitative and qualitative evaluation of one such program, “Parent Project,” a parent education program currently operating in 38 states for parents of at-risk and/or court-referred youth.

### Program Overview and Conceptual Frame

Established in 1987 by a law enforcement officer, an adult educator, and a clinical psychologist, Parent Project is a 10- to 16-week, behavior-modification-based parenting program

for self- and system-referred parents of at-risk or out-of-control youth. Parent Project was developed by soliciting and responding to parents' questions about their at-risk adolescents. The program targets parents whose adolescents exhibit behaviors such as running away, drug and/or alcohol use, poor school attendance, or violence (Fry, Johnson, Melendez, & Morgan, 2003). Consisting of two parts, Parent Project is designed to "help parents effectively demonstrate their love for their children, ensure parents experience early success, encourage parents to stay with the process, teach intervention/prevention strategies, and improve parent/child relationships" (Fry et al., 2003, p. 9).

Part one of the program educates parents on the core curriculum. During each of these six weeks, the trained facilitator leads parents through the unit curriculum in an effort to help parents learn to understand their children and address problematic behavior. Small support groups of four to five parents remain intact throughout these weeks. Part two of the program focuses on supporting change and encouraging parents. At week seven, two small support groups meld and become a support group of 8 to 10 parents. Units 7 through 10 are again delivered by the facilitator, and provide opportunities for parents to practice and refine skills and to begin to form autonomous "Mutual Support Groups" in keeping with the UCLA Model (California Self-Help Center at UCLA, 1985). Units 11-16 are optional, but recommended, and are led by trained facilitators or by parents. Parent-led support groups frequently continue after week 16, utilizing a structured support group format. One such group in Honolulu has continued to meet for four years.

Parent Project is firmly grounded in the principles of behavior modification. Thus, the program places low initial emphasis on youth insight and much more emphasis on appropriate parental control to change youth behavior. It is anticipated that youth attitudinal change will

follow youth behavioral change (Fry et al., 2003). Parent Project facilitators teach parents to influence their children and motivate them to change their own behavior via positive strokes, positive consequences, and negative consequences. Altogether, Parent Project's goal is to empower parents, through instruction of effective strategies ("predictable interventions," p. 9) that can be applied to nearly all populations and are based on behavioral concepts.

### Parent Project Program Theory

A logic model illustrates the logical flow between a program's essential components and goals. It therefore provides a visual depiction of the program theory, and serves as a useful framework for program evaluation (Millar, Simeone, & Carnevale, 2001; Savaya & Waysman, 2005). Figure 1 portrays Parent Project's essential components, anticipated parent outcomes, and anticipated youth outcomes. As indicated, the parent-related program objectives include (a) enhancing parenting skills related to connection with and regulation of adolescents, and (b) providing participants with practical support. These direct outcomes are hypothesized to indirectly impact adolescent's choices with regard to antisocial behaviors and school-related outcomes.

Figure 1 about here

First, with regard to parenting skills, Parent Project attempts to provide parents with specific tools to help them connect with and regulate their youth. To foster a stronger connection with their adolescents, Parent Project facilitators teach participants a variety of ways to show love/affect, to be involved positively in the life of their child, and to create and value family time. Examples of skills taught include direct, daily, verbal expressions of love; physical affection such as hugging, kissing, and patting on the back; and indirect expressions or indications of love such as writing a love note or cooking for one's children. In addition to the

emphasis on connection-fostering behaviors, Parent Project facilitators also teach a variety of tools to increase parent's ability to regulate their youth. For example, they teach parents to consider and inquire about the "5 Ws" (Fry et al., 2003, p. 30) representing "Who," "What," "Where," "When," and "Why" about their adolescents' activities. They also teach parents how to involve youth in creating the rules that will govern the adolescent's participation in each requested activity, and to occasionally "Spot Check" (p. 30) to see if their adolescents are doing what they claimed to be doing. "Child's List" (p. 37), another tool suggested in the Parent Project curriculum, involves parents creating a list of things their child enjoys doing that will be withheld until required work or activities are completed.

In addition to increased connection- and regulation-related parental behaviors, the program theory reflected in the logic model (see Figure 1) also indicates an anticipated increase in parental practical support as a result of participation in the program. Parent Project recognizes the importance of helping parents at the practical level. Practical support needs consist of the day-to-day stresses and tangible deficits that inhibit parents from parenting more effectively. Examples of practical support needs include child care and transportation. Parent Project encourages communication of participants' practical support needs to facilitate an exchange of ideas and resources.

It is anticipated that these parental outcomes will subsequently contribute to the youth outcomes indicated in Figure 1, specifically decreased antisocial behaviors and improved school-related outcomes.

#### Review of Literature Related to Program Theory

Much research supports the program theory as reflected in the logic model depicted in Figure 1. In correlational analyses, connection in the family environment, measured as perceived

support from parents, has been predictive of school performance for samples of predominantly White fifth and eighth graders in Utah (Barber & Olsen, 1997), predominantly White and Asian American high school students in California (Herman, Dornbush, Herron, & Hertig, 1997), and predominantly Black seventh graders from Maryland (Eccles, Early, Frasier, Belansky, & McCarthy, 1997). Additionally, Grolnick and Ryan (1989), Sanders (1998), and Connell and Wellborn (1991) all suggest a relationship between parental support/connection and youth school-related outcomes. Stolz et al. (2004) reported that of connection- and regulation-related behaviors from both parents and teachers, father's support was consistently among the most predictive variables in relation to adolescent school achievement across 10 diverse national-ethnic groups. Gregory and Weinstein (2004) indicated that adolescents' perceptions of parent connection and teacher connection contribute to an additive model, and both types of connection uniquely predict adolescents' academic achievement. Recent cross-national research also links parental support with concurrent and subsequent youth social initiative and (less) youth depression (Barber et al., 2005).

Research also supports the role of parental regulation in the lives of adolescents, particularly suggesting linkages between parental regulatory behaviors and decreased antisocial behaviors. With regard to adolescent delinquency and other antisocial behaviors, recent research has indicated that a high level of parental behavioral control including monitoring and knowledge of adolescents' friends and activities has a "specialized relationship" (Barber et al., 2005, p. 57) with decreased antisocial behavior, suggesting that it is the most effective intervention target at the parental level. Specifically, Stolz, Barber, and Olsen (2005) indicated that maternal behavioral control was relatively more important than all other measured parenting constructs (paternal behavioral control, maternal and paternal support, and maternal and paternal

psychological control) in predicting subsequent adolescent antisocial behavior. Amato and Fowler's (2002) study of parenting practices within a nationally-representative, multi-ethnic U.S. sample also support this link between parental monitoring and decreased subsequent behavior problems across diverse family contexts, and Laird, Pettit, Dodge, and Bates (2003) found this link to be consistent over time. Additionally, youth disclosure to parents of whereabouts and activities was shown to buffer youth from initial alcohol use as well as alcohol misuse (Barnes, Reifman, Farrell, & Dintcheff, 2000). In sum, Parent Project's program theory is well-supported by existing research.

### Research Questions

Given the Parent Project logic model as specified above and the reviewed literature, the present study addressed the following research questions. At week 8 of the Parent Project program:

- (1) Are parents engaging in more connection-related behaviors?
- (2) Are parents engaging in more regulation-related behaviors?
- (3) Has youth school achievement increased?
- (4) Have youth antisocial behaviors decreased?
- (5) Did parents receive the practical support they needed?
- (6) Do the skills taught match the actual problems experienced by the parents?

### Methodology

#### *Quantitative Study*

Pre-workshop and follow-up surveys of Parent Project workshop participants and their focal adolescents were used to gather quantitative data to address research questions one through four and question six.



### *Site and Participant Selection*

The on-site facilitators of all Parent Project workshops nationwide, scheduled to begin during an identified 6-week period were contacted and invited to have their site included in the present study, resulting in 13 eligible survey sites. All workshop facilitators agreed to participate; therefore, all sites were included in the study. These workshops were held in various locations within the United States (three workshops in each of California and Pennsylvania; two workshops in each of Florida, Idaho, and Ohio; and one workshop in Alabama). At each survey site, the onsite Parent Project facilitator invited workshop participants to take part in the study. Research participants were provided time during their first and eighth week meetings to complete pre- and post-surveys. As an incentive, all study participants were entered into a drawing for a new computer. To ensure the confidentiality of responses, participants were provided stamped, addressed envelopes and were instructed to return their surveys directly to the research team via mail. Participants were also provided with youth pre-program and follow-up surveys (again, with pre-addressed, stamped envelopes to be mailed directly to the research team) and were invited to have their target adolescent participate.

A total of 180 workshop participants were present at week 1 and were offered the opportunity to participate in the research study. Surveys were received via mail from 127 participants (71%). The vast majority (76%) of the respondents were female and were an average 42.1 years of age ( $SD = 8.7$ ). Of the 127 participating parents, 42 attended with a spouse or partner who shared in their concern for the focal adolescent, thus only 106 youth were offered the opportunity to participate in the study. A total of 71 (67%) of the potential 106 youth surveys were completed and returned. Forty-four percent of the adolescent respondents were female, and adolescent respondents were an average 14.1 years of age ( $SD = 2.2$ ).

Of the original 127 parents who participated in the study at week 1, 98 attended the week 8 workshop session. Follow-up parent surveys were received from 70 parents, representing 71% of those who (a) completed a pre-workshop survey and (b) were still regularly attending the program. Thirty-two of the youth who responded to the initial survey also responded to the follow-up survey.

### *Measures*

*Parental support.* The Acceptance subscale of the Child Report of Parent Behavior Inventory (Schaefer, 1965) was used to assess youth report of mother's and father's support, a key parental commodity contributing to a state of relational connection (Barber et al., 2005). Youth rated each parent on a 3-point scale (1 = *not at all like her/him*, 2 = *somewhat like her/him*, 3 = *very much like her/him*) on a series of 10 items. Sample items include, "makes me feel better after talking over my worries with her/him" and "enjoys doing things with me." For the parent report of parental support, parents responded to the same items, reworded to reflect parental report of parenting. These items were averaged to construct three scale scores – youth report of mother's support, youth report of father's support, and parent report of parent's support of their adolescent.

*Parental behavioral control.* Regulation, like connection, is a state-like construct, and behavioral control is a key, parental contributor to the goal state (Barber et al., 2005). Parental knowledge of youth behavior, one component of parental behavioral control, was measured by a five item scale frequently used in family research with adolescents (e.g., Brown, Mounts, Lamborn, & Steinberg, 1993). This scale has previously been considered a measurement of monitoring, but clarifications and reconceptualizations support the label "parental knowledge" (Crouter & Head, 2002; Kerr & Stattin, 2000; Stattin & Kerr, 2000). Youth responded on a 3-

point scale from 1 = *Doesn't know* to 3 = *Knows a lot* concerning how much their mothers and fathers (separately) “really know” (a) “Where you go at night,” (b) “Where you are most afternoons after school,” (c) “How you spend your money,” (d) “What you do with your free time,” and (e) “Who your friends are.” Again, parents responded to similar, reworded items to measure parents’ report of parental behavioral control. These items were averaged to create two youth report scales and one parent report scale.

*Adolescent antisocial behavior.* Antisocial behavior was measured by the Delinquent subscale of the Child Behavior Checklist – Youth Self-Report (Achenbach & Edelbrock, 1987). Response categories ranged from 0 = *not true* to 2 = *very true or often true*. Sample items include, “I steal things from places other than home,” “I lie or cheat,” and “I use alcohol or drugs for non-medical purposes.” Parents, again, responded to similar items to measure parental reports of youth antisocial behavior. These items were averaged to construct parent-reported and youth-reported youth antisocial behavior scales.

*Adolescent school achievement.* Parental report of school achievement was measured with the one item, “Over the past month, how have your child’s grades been in school?” Response categories ranged from 1 = *well below average* to 5 = *well above average*. Similarly, youth were asked to use the same response categories and respond to the item, “Over the past month, how have your grades been in school?” This item has been used by various researchers with good predictive validity (Stolz et al., 2004).

*Participant satisfaction.* Parental general satisfaction with the program was measured with five items including, “I learned new and useful information” and, “Overall, I am very satisfied with this training.” Response categories ranged from 1 = *strongly disagree* to 5 = *strongly agree*. These items have not previously been used in published work.

### *Analysis*

Means, standard deviations, correlations, and scale reliabilities for all measures stemming from the pre-workshop and follow-up surveys are presented in Tables 1 and 2, respectively. For the parenting and youth functioning scales, Cronbach's alphas ranged from .78 to .96 for youth reports and .78 to .89 for parent report, thus we were able to measure all study variables with reasonable reliability.

Tables 1 and 2 about here

Paired *t*-tests were used to evaluate whether parents and youth (separately) reported significantly different levels of parental support, parental behavioral control, youth antisocial behavior, and school achievement at week 8 of the program compared to week 1. One-tailed *t*-tests were used since all hypotheses were directional in nature.

### *Qualitative Study*

The qualitative portion of the present study employed focus group methodology to assess parental perceptions of Parent Project. Focus groups were chosen as a method of research for this study because this approach is ideally suited to formative evaluation purposes. Khan, Anker, Patel, Barge, Sadhwani, and Kohle (1991) indicated that because people in focus groups share similar backgrounds, they are put at ease, thus encouraging them to express themselves openly. While some of our research questions pertain to constructs that can be adequately measured quantitatively (i.e., potential change in parental connection- and regulation-related behaviors, youth antisocial behavior, and youth school achievement), we deemed qualitative data to be very useful in addressing two particular research questions – the extent to which the participants received the practical support they needed, and the extent to which the skills taught matched the problems experienced by the participants.

### *Site and Participant Selection*

The three Parent Project workshop sites in Southern California that participated in the quantitative portion of the study were additionally selected for focus group evaluation, primarily due to the proximity to the researchers. A fourth focus group site, not included in the quantitative study because the start date fell outside the identified timeframe, was added to the qualitative study due to poor participant turn out and resulting low data yield at a prior site. At each site, the on-site Parent Project facilitator was asked to contact 10 parents who were registered for the workshop and invite them to participate in both an initial focus group (taking place 75 minutes prior to the start of the first session) and a follow-up focus group (taking place prior to the eighth session). Dinner was provided, since many parents came directly from work. Additionally, focus group participants were entered into a drawing for a gift certificate to a restaurant. Parent Project facilitators were asked to make a reminder call the night before the initial focus group to all parents who agreed to participate. This strategy resulted in 29 initial focus group participants. Twenty-three of these subjects also participated in the follow-up focus group; four others were no longer attending the program, and two initial focus group participants experienced transportation difficulties that kept them from participating in the follow-up focus group.

### *Focus Group Methodology*

Four initial focus groups ranging from 2 to 10 participants were conducted. Given that participants were homogenous with regard to their status as having an at-risk adolescent, we found it unnecessary to divide groups by gender or any other criteria. Each focus group lasted approximately 60 minutes and was audio-taped. A moderator posed questions and responded to participants in order to facilitate a guided discussion. An assistant summarized participant

comments on a flipchart. The first and second authors of the present manuscript rotated between moderator and assistant moderator.

*Pre-workshop focus group protocol.* The pre-program and follow-up focus group protocols were guided by our Parent Project logic model, and were planned to generate data that would, in combination with the quantitative study, fully address our stated research goals. Thus, our targeted research questions were (a) what are parents' practical support needs, and were they met by the program? And, (b) do the skills taught fit the actual needs of these parents and their adolescents?

To address the practical support component, we stated,

“Sometimes parenting is hard because we have some basic day-to-day needs that cause us stress. For example, our car breaks down, or we're having trouble at work. We're wondering if you feel like you have enough support with these day-to-day issues, or if not, what kind of help or support would make your job as a parent easier?”

To address the second question above – the fit of skills taught needs of the participants – we stated the following:

“Most of the parents in this program are here because they are experiencing some difficulties with their adolescent. We'd like to start by just trying to better understand these difficulties. We're hoping you can give us some examples of situations you've been in recently with your son or daughter where you just weren't quite sure what to do.”

Although we can easily measure quantitatively whether parents have increased in particular instructed behaviors and whether targeted youth outcomes are impacted, we believe

that the qualitative data generated by this line of questioning will serve as an important validity check for the program theory itself. It is possible that a program could significantly alter both parenting and youth functioning, but still rather miss the mark of solving the real problems of real people.

*Follow-up focus group protocol.* At the follow-up focus group session we again addressed the same two questions. First, we reported back to parents the practical support needs that they mentioned earlier, displaying the themes on a flipchart pad. Then, we asked them to tell us whether the program had provided them with any additional sources of support or had reduced the needs they had previously mentioned. To address the second question, we reminded parents of the problems they were having with their adolescents at week 1 by showing them a flipchart indicating the themes that had been identified. The moderator then asked them to comment on the extent to which the skills they learned in the program were helping them with these problems. Additionally, at the follow-up focus group, participants were asked to comment on their overall satisfaction with the program as well as what, if any, changes they would suggest.

### *Analysis*

Data from all eight focus groups were transcribed and analyzed into coding schemes based on our logic model. Thus, the following initial codes were employed: practical support, problem with youth, and satisfaction with program. Then, we reanalyzed all passages that were coded “practical support,” and “problem with youth” to identify secondary themes within those categories. We employed sentence code analysis given that Strauss and Corbin (1998) stated that this coding scheme is useful when the researcher already has established categories and wants to code according to those categories. Moreover, according to Weston, Gandell, Beauchamp, McAlpine, Wiseman, & Beauchamp (2001), it is appropriate to use research questions as a

“frame of reference” (p. 386) to develop categories of the coding system. In order to establish reliability and credibility of the themes and findings, researchers suggest having transcriptions read by other researchers (Huberman & Miles, 1994). In fact, according to Weston et al., coding by research team members who share an understanding of the material better enables the researchers to capture the complexity of interpretations and arrive at a richer understanding. Therefore, three additional research team members coded all eight transcriptions. When discrepancies occurred, they were discussed by the group until a consensus was reached.

## Results

### *Regarding Change in Parental Connection-related Behaviors*

Using parent-reported data, the results of paired *t*-tests suggest significant increases between week 1 and week 8 measures of parental support,  $t(70) = 4.55, p < .0001$  (one-tailed). Youth reports also suggest significant increases between week 1 and week 8 in mother’s support,  $t(32) = 1.85, p < .05$  (one-tailed) and father’s support,  $t(29) = 1.94, p < .05$  (one-tailed).

### *Regarding Change in Parental Regulation-related Behaviors*

The results of paired *t*-tests also suggest significant increases between week 1 and week 8 measures of parent-reported parental behavioral control,  $t(69) = 3.62, p < .0001$  (one-tailed). Youth reports suggest significant increases between week 1 and week 8 in mother’s behavioral control,  $t(31) = 2.36, p < .05$  (one-tailed) but not father’s behavioral control,  $t(29) = .80, p = .78$  (one-tailed).

### *Regarding Change in Youth School Achievement*

Parents also reported significantly higher levels of youth school achievement at week 8 than at week 1,  $t(68) = 2.36, p < .01$  (one-tailed); however, adolescents report the same average grade at both weeks 1 and 8,  $t(31) = .00, p = .50$  (one-tailed).



*Regarding Change in Youth Antisocial Behaviors*

Parents report a significant decrease between week 1 and week 8 youth antisocial behavior,  $t(69) = 3.55, p < .001$  (one-tailed), and adolescents also report significant decreases in these behaviors,  $t(31) = 2.00, p < .05$  (one-tailed).

*Regarding Practical Support of Parents*

Participants were asked to comment on their practical needs which, if left unmet, might limit their ability to parent effectively. From parents' stated practical needs and concerns at the initial focus group, two categories emerged: work-related difficulties, and specific needs related to single parenting.

Parents felt that their work environments were strongly affected by their adolescent's behavior problems. One parent shared,

Today was a perfect example. I pull up to work, and I got a crew of five guys and some equipment standing around because I was on the phone with the school because my kid ditched class.... And it is just not my time, but I had these guys not being managed at work, so times twenty dollars an hour per guy. It gets really expensive, really fast.

Another parent shared, "I know my employers get sick and tired of hearing, 'the principal is on the phone,' 'your mother is on the phone,' 'the police are on the phone' or '[I] have to go to court again.' They get tired of it." A parent in a different group indicated, "I have been warned and put on probation from taking my daughter to appointments and court hearings and this and that. And my productivity has been highly affected."

The specific practical support needs of single parents were mentioned in all groups. One single parent indicated that having an out-of-control teenager was difficult, "especially when you

are a single parent and you are doing it all on your own. You know, you have to work.” A parent in another group stated, “I know there are some couples here together, but and I know you [indicating another focus group participant] have mentioned the father was not active. Same here. He is in the picture, but just barely there, just a phone call here and there.” One single parent mentioned that she has another child who has health issues, making it difficult for the mother to balance her time between the child who has health issues and the child who is at-risk, while working part-time. Other single parents also expressed a practical need for supervision of their adolescent, both during and after school. Several single parents indicated that it would help if their son or daughter could find some form of job.

At the follow-up focus group session, parents indicated that these practical needs had been reduced indirectly, through resources shared by the facilitator and/or other participants. When the moderator asked parents if they had received assistance with the day-to-day stresses they had mentioned at the pre-workshop focus group, one parent said, “We talked about that, and then people shared between their different things, resources that they had.” Another parent commented, “I think ... we discovered some places where we can get some resources. We kind of, you know, look more at what resources are out there.” One parent stated, “I’m aware that the school has the ability to give you a weekly report. If you ask for it, they will give it to you.”

When asked specifically about the issues of supervision at school and jobs to keep teenagers busy that had emerged from the initial focus groups, one parent indicated, “Well, let’s put it this way: it [Parent Project] made us aware of tools that we weren’t aware existed.”

#### *Regarding the Match between Skills Taught and Problems Experienced*

At the pre-focus group, we asked parents to identify problems they were having with their teens, in order to later assess whether the skills they were taught were appropriate for the

actual problems the parents were facing. The experiences of the families were varied; some parents were experiencing extreme forms of “out of control” behaviors, while others were dealing with less destructive youth behaviors. For example, one parent stated,

My daughter held a knife to her neck and asked me, or basically told me, that if I did not let her spend the night at her friend’s house, she was going to kill herself. I did not know how to respond to that.

Another parent commented, “I don’t have knives in my home, because while I was sleeping my son stabbed my bed, but of course he couldn’t go to juvenile hall yet because it wasn’t serious enough. Drugs are evil.”

Other parents were dealing with less dangerous problems. One parent stated, “Well, the biggest thing I’m having a problem with is getting him to do his homework.” Another parent said, “Disrespect, keeping his room clean. You can’t get him to do anything, he just drags it out.” There were several parents who were experiencing problems with inappropriate clothing, disrespectful attitude, non-compliance, runaways and sexual behaviors. There were also a few parents whose adolescents were engaging in self-mutilation. Overall, 14 subcategories of “problem with youth” were identified by coders: self-destructive behavior, communication issues, substance use/abuse, school related, aggressive behavior, gang activity, peers/friends, sexual behavior, media/technology, couple relationships, challenging parental authority, stealing, running away, and lack of motivation.

At the post-focus group session, we showed participants these categories and asked whether the skills they had learned had helped them with the problems they were having. Generally, parents felt more competent to handle the situations they had mentioned eight weeks earlier. One parent said, “We do not have any of those problems any more....I mean it’s just

100%. I've never seen such change." Another parent mentioned, "Lack of communication and arguing have definitely decreased." A parent in another group indicated, "I don't argue with them anymore. I mean, they are still argumentative, but if you just say 'however,' 'nevertheless,' and repeat yourself, they cannot argue with you anymore." Another strategy many parents found useful was "TEASPOT" (take everything away for a short period of time). With regard to the problem of stealing, one parent said, "I've got that [problem] a little bit, but it is getting better because every time they do that, they get a TEASPOT and [the severity of the TEASPOT] is gradually increasing, so it is getting to where it is so painful. We are still working on it, but it is better." Another parent stated, "If you do what they tell you, what the facilitator says, and you really want to put in the time from three until he goes to bed at ten ... and he goes to bed when we say now ... if parents keep up everything that they have said here, there is no problem." In every group we prompted participants, indicating that we would really appreciate hearing about problems they might have that were not being addressed by their new skills. Of the participants who offered comments, all but one parent indicated that the behaviors they were dealing with had either diminished or decreased substantially. The remaining parent stated, "Ours has not improved, but there's a desire there to improve that was not there before."

General satisfaction with the content and format of the program was also assessed.

Overall, parents ranked their satisfaction with the program as 4.54 / 5.00 on a five-item satisfaction with program scale. Although our pre-program focus group protocol did not include questions about parents' general attitudes toward the program, several parents nonetheless made positive statements such as, "I do not want to miss a thing," "We have been waiting for months for this," and "Yeah, coming here is wonderful."

At the post-program focus group session, parents' reported high overall satisfaction with Parent Project. Parents liked the information and the fact that it was practical. One parent said, "The ideas you would never even think of." At each group parents also felt relieved that they were not the only ones having these difficulties with their teenagers. One parent said, "It gave me a peace of mind." Another parent mentioned, "I cannot remember anything that I heard in class or in the book that I thought was not worth trying."

When we asked parents to offer suggestions for program changes, most commented on the hours. One parent said, "It was long, some of those nights were long." Another parent added, "Long, and I think some things could be compressed. And I think some ideas were so basic, but then they just kept going over and over." A parent from a different group said, "You know a little break would be great." A parent in another group, however, offered the following, "I think we need the three hours, I felt like three hours was a small investment for all the benefits you got out of it."

### Discussion

*Overall conclusions.* The Parent Project workshop participants who continued to participate in both the program and the research study over seven weeks reported quite positive results, as did their focal adolescents. Youth and parents report higher levels of parental support, and reviewed literature suggests that higher levels of parental support are predictive of higher levels of school achievement (Barber & Olsen, 1997) and prosocial engagement outside the home (Barber et al., 2005). Although youth do not report a significant change in grades over these 7 weeks, parents do. We view youth report of grades as more valid than parent report; however, it is nonetheless noteworthy that parents are apparently feeling more hopeful about their adolescent's school achievement. Research by Taylor and Lopez (2005) suggests that these

higher expectations might, in and of themselves, promote higher performance from adolescents over time.

Workshop participants also reported that they were engaging in higher levels of behavioral control at week 8 than prior to the workshop, and youth agree that their mothers are, but report no significant change in their fathers' behavioral control. This finding is not surprising, given that the majority of Parent Project participants are mothers who had first-hand (rather than trickle-down) training. Recent evidence suggests that around the world, mother's behavioral control is uniquely (negatively) predictive of adolescent antisocial behavior (Barber et al., 2005; Stolz et al., 2005), thus it is important that after only 7 weeks, both participants and their youth agree that the level of this key, maternal variable has changed.

Youth and parents also report a corresponding decrease in antisocial behavior. While it was possible that this hypothesized outcome might have taken longer to appear, or that antisocial behavior might have even increased in the short-term as an initial reaction to the sudden increase in parental regulation, it is quite promising that behaviors such as stealing, swearing, hanging out with deviant peers, and using drugs and alcohol significantly decrease in the short-term. One of Parent Project's goals is to empower parents to stay with the process, and early success is a key element of that process.

*Limitations of the study and implications for future research.* This study is limited in several ways that suggest corresponding limitations on the validity and generalizability of the findings. First, although we utilized a strong initial sampling frame for our quantitative study (all Parent Project workshop attendees at all workshops in the United States taking place over a specified period), our pre-post comparisons were based on participants who remained in the program and in the research study at week 8, and are therefore based on data from a relatively

small percentage of individuals in the initial sampling frame (39% of parents and 32% of youth). Second, the impact of the program on these individuals after week 8 was not addressed in the present study. Third, although we included both parent and youth quantitative reports and additionally utilized qualitative data from workshop participants, we did not solicit qualitative feedback from youth, nor did we solicit or include the reports of a neutral informant such as a teacher. Last, the research design did not include random assignment of parents to treatment or control conditions. Thus, it is possible that the results suggested in the present study are part of a familial developmental trajectory such that parents seek help when they are in “rock bottom” conditions, and in the natural course of family life, both parenting and youth outcomes regress toward the mean (see Streiner, 2001).

Given these study limitations, future research on the effectiveness of this and other parent education programs should seek to obtain both quantitative and qualitative data from multiple informants at pre-intervention, post-intervention, and follow-up intervals. Additionally, program evaluators should endeavor to maximize the initial response rate relative to the sampling frame, and utilize the resulting data to identify risk-factors for program and/or research study drop-out. Ideally, random assignment to a control condition and multiple treatment conditions would best address the impact of Parent Project relative to alternative options for parents of at-risk adolescents. Lastly, one of the benefits of a “research – practice calibration” (Law, Stolz, & Wells, 2005, p. 1) in which a program theory is specified and compared with social scientific research findings, is that it identifies non-targeted potential outcomes of an intervention. The literature reviewed in the present manuscript relative to the Parent Project logic model suggests that the program might also be significantly increasing youth social initiative and decreasing youth depression (Barber et al., 2005; Stolz et al., 2005), thus we suggest that these constructs be

measured in future Parent Project evaluation efforts to potentially document non-targeted benefits of the program.

*Implications for programming.* Despite the limitations of the study, the “take away” message regarding the evaluated program is quite encouraging. The skills taught were appreciated by the participants, were quite suitable to the problems these parents were experiencing, and appeared to generally translate into improved parenting and youth functioning. Parents appreciated the opportunity to share resources to address their practical needs. Participants’ satisfaction with the program is important, because research has shown that high participant commitment is related to the practice of skills (Rodgers, Hunter, & Rogers, 1993).

Practitioners working with parents of at-risk youth should note the stated needs of these parents for supportive relationships with other parents in similar situations. In other words, one strength of The Parent Project is simply that it brings together parents with similar problems. Program facilitators can capitalize on that strength by providing adequate discussion time in which supportive bonds can develop. It is noteworthy that the retention rate for the qualitative study was much higher than that for the quantitative study (86% compared to 55%), and that many focus group participants indicated that they felt much more supported by the group as a result of their initial focus group experience. One participant indicated that she “felt sorry for” the workshop participants who did not have the initial focus group opportunity. Program facilitators of this and other programs might also consider whether 15 minutes of material could be removed from the 3-hour workshop to allow for a mid-workshop break. Additionally, program staff should identify participants who are most at-risk for program drop-out and (a) encourage their continuation in the program and/or (b) alter the program to better meet their needs.



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