

# Prevention Brief

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## Principles for Informing and Engaging Parents

By Belinda Basca

### Introduction

Each of the 35 counties in California awarded the California Safe and Drug-Free Schools and Communities (SDFSC) grant must include a parental component within their program structure. For many counties, this has been one of the most challenging, yet rewarding, aspects of the entire grant. To assist programs with this challenge, the SDFSC Technical Assistance Project developed this brief in collaboration with grantees and experts in the field of parental involvement. The brief has several goals:

- ✓ Inform programs of what a parental component might look like through a continuum of parent involvement strategies;
- ✓ Discuss when to inform and involve parents in youth-based services versus engage parents in family-based services;
- ✓ Identify recent research findings on informing and engaging parents and specific strategies that programs can implement; and
- ✓ Provide tips for being culturally sensitive when working with families of diverse ethnic and cultural backgrounds.

Why is it so challenging to work with parents? What does the research say about informing and engaging parents? What have some SDFSC grantees done to meet and overcome these challenges? This brief will answer those questions and provide programs with practical insights into working successfully with parents.

### Why is parental involvement essential to the California Safe and Drug-Free Schools and Communities (SDFSC) programs?

The demographic of the family today is substantially different than that of a few generations ago. Families today are more mobile than ever before and don't live near extended family members as often. In the past, extended family members provided informal support, advice, and assistance to youth. Today, many youth must navigate adolescence without these additional anchors of support. Parents feel a lack of support as well. In fact, 86 percent of parents reported that they are often uncertain about what is the right thing to do in raising their children (Porter and Rice, 1995).

*It's not only children who grow. Parents do too. As much as we watch to see what our children do with their lives, they are watching us to see what we do with ours. I can't tell my children to reach for the sun. All I can do is reach for it, myself.*  
- Joyce Maynard

The parental component of the SDFSC grants is one way to offer this support to parents and youth. The goal is to empower parents to have more involvement in what is happening in children's lives; both in school and in the activities children participate in outside of school. The driving force behind this movement is the *No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB)*, which President Bush initiated three days after taking office in January 2001. A focus of this legislation is on increasing parental involvement by making parents aware of what is happening in children's lives and giving them the power to choose the services their children receive. Empowered parents are more likely to feel supported by the schools and communities in which they live.

**The four pillars of the NCLB legislation are:**

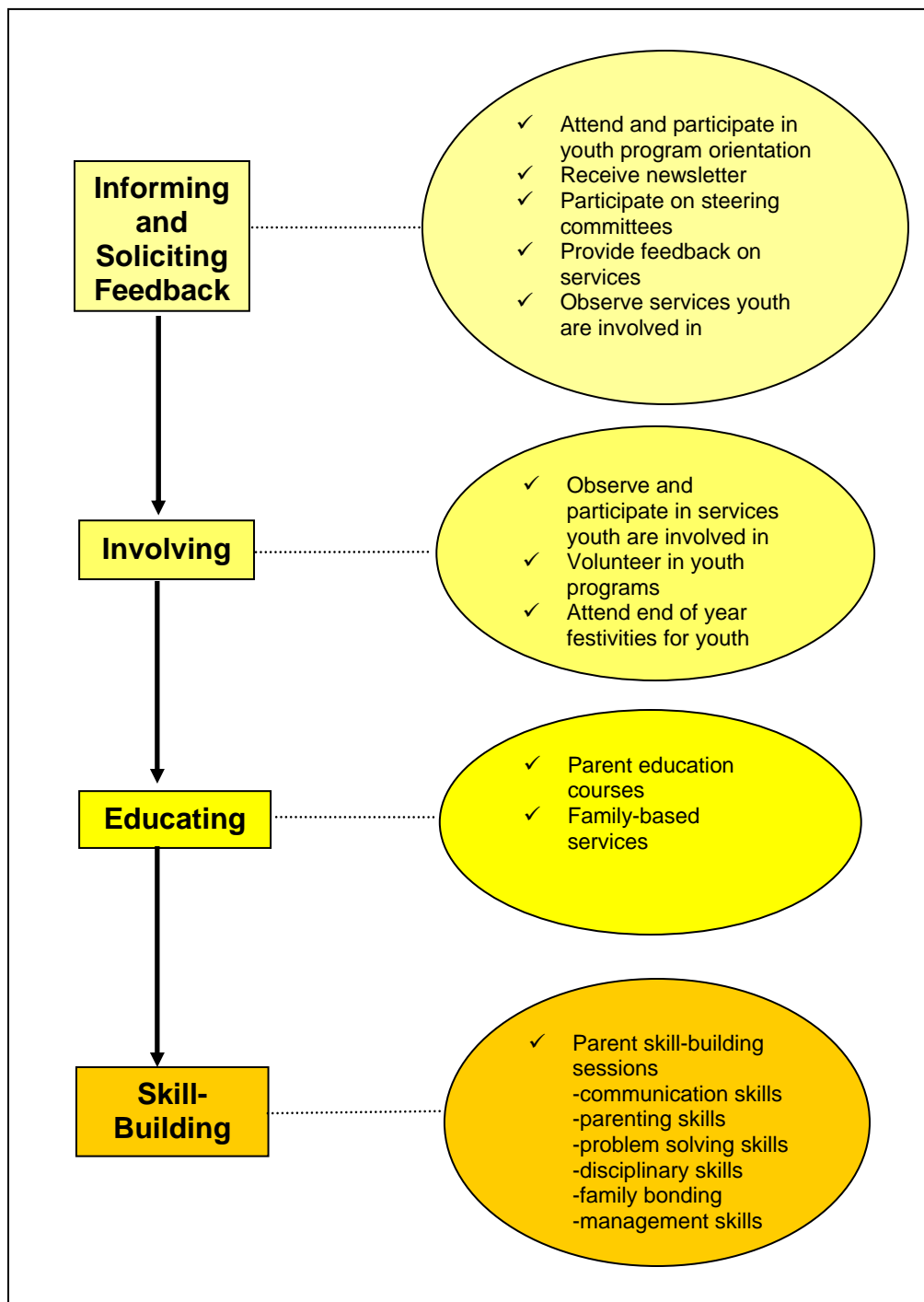
1. Holding schools/programs accountable for results;
2. An increased focus on implementing programs or strategies that have already been proven to be effective through scientific research;
3. Increased parental awareness and choice regarding the instruction/services that their children receive; and
4. Increased local control and flexibility in designing and implementing funding initiatives.

An additional driving force behind increased parental involvement is a renewed focus by the Department of Education on ensuring quality and effective SDFSC programs. *The Principles of Effectiveness (POE)* serve as a framework for planning, implementing, and evaluating all SDFSC programs. Established in 1998, the principles were revised after enactment of the NCLB to include a parent involvement component. That component guides programs to: "Include meaningful and ongoing consultation with and input from parents in the development of, application and administration of the program or activity."

At a minimal level, meeting this requirement includes informing and involving parents in the types of youth-based services offered through the program. At an advanced level, it involves engaging parents in family-based services. While programs may provide services to a broader range of parents within the target community or school, they should conduct more specific outreach and service efforts for the parents of the youth participating in the program. The graphic **on the following page** details the types of activities for each category of parental involvement.

In accordance with the minimum requirements, all SDFSC programs are informing and involving parents to some extent. Additionally, many programs have taken on the challenge of engaging parents and/or caregivers in family-based services. By adopting SAMHSA model programs such as *Families and Schools Together (FAST)*, *Strengthening Families*, and *Families That Care: Guiding Good Choices*, programs aim to educate or strengthen the skills of parents in their programs.

## The Continuum of Parent Involvement in SDFSC programs



## Why is it so challenging to engage parents in prevention services?

Although many parents want to support their children, finding the time to do so is often challenging. It is not that parents today are less concerned than parents of the past about the behavior of their children or the transfer of values and norms. Rather, today's parents have lost some of their ability to sustain long-lasting monitoring and correction of their children's behavior (Junger-Tas, 1994, as cited in Henricson & Roker, 2000). And once lost, this ability can be very hard to regain. The new demography of the American family shows a varied set of work arrangements, including single-parent households and two-earner families (Riley, 1994). This diversity of family work arrangements—as well as an increasing number of social problems that impact parenting, such as poverty, drug abuse, and crime (Henricson & Roker, 2000)—make it more challenging to involve parents in SDFSC programs. Additional motivational supports are needed to draw parents in, and even more are needed to sustain their involvement.<sup>1</sup>

## Why is it important to inform and involve parents in youth-based services?

Research shows that when parents are involved in their children's lives, the children exhibit more positive attitudes and behavior (National PTA, 1998). In addition, problems such as alcohol use, violence, and antisocial behavior have been found to decrease as parent involvement increases. In fact, the most accurate predictor of students' achievement in school is not income or social status. Rather, it is the extent to which their family creates a home environment that encourages learning; communicates high, yet reasonable expectations for their achievement and future career; and is involved in their education at school and in the community (National PTA, 1998). These research findings provide strong evidence regarding the importance of informing and involving parents in the prevention services their children are receiving through the SDFSC programs. In addition, keeping parents informed and involved empowers them to provide feedback and input regarding the services their children are receiving; parental feedback can be critical to ensuring program success.

## What Does Research Say About Informing and Involving Parents in Youth-Based Services?

The National PTA (1998) generated the *National Standards for Parent/Family Involvement Programs*. The six standards provided programs with a framework from which to inform and involve parents in the school. These same standards can be extended to other youth-based services, particularly communication and volunteering.

### **National Standards for Parent/Family Services** (National PTA, 1998):

**Standard I: Communicating**—Communication between home and school is regular, two-way, and meaningful.

**Standard II: Parenting**—Parenting skills are promoted and supported.

**Standard III: Student Learning**—Parents play an integral role in assisting student learning.

**Standard IV: Volunteering**—Parents are welcome in the school, and their support and assistance are sought.

**Standard V: School Decision Making and Advocacy**—Parents are full partners in the decisions that affect children and families.

**Standard VI: Collaborating with Community**—Community resources are used to strengthen schools, families, and student learning.

Informing parents via a newsletter or phone call is often enough. A survey of the effectiveness of child age-specific newsletters sent to the parents of some 726 adolescents was conducted (Bogenschneider & Stone, 1997, as cited in Henricson & Roker, 2000). This minimal intervention of disseminating three newsletters resulted in higher levels of parental monitoring. Additionally, parents were more responsive to their children, engaging in more intimate discussions with them about adolescent risk behaviors. There were also more family discussions with the newsletter providing the focal point.

*What a child doesn't receive he can seldom later give.*  
- P.D. James, *Time to Be in Earnest*

In their national study of 2,317 inner-city elementary and middle school students, Dauber and Epstein (1993) found that the best predictor of parent involvement was the steps the school took to promote it. School staff attitudes and actions were more important than the parents' income, educational level, or race in predicting parent involvement in the school. These findings demonstrate the need for programs to actively recruit and retain parents and make them feel appreciated and necessary in the process.

Involving parents in youth activities, both in and outside of school, can also be highly effective. Recent research showed that students with involved parents were more likely to earn higher grades and test scores, attend school regularly, have better social skills, show improved behavior, and adapt well to school (Landsverk, 2004). Interestingly, several studies showed that families of all ethnic and cultural groups are engaged in supporting their children's learning at home. However, white families tend to be more involved at school. Supporting more involvement at school from all families—of all ethnic and cultural groups—is an important strategy for meeting the needs of youth.

### **What are the advantages of providing family-based services versus youth-based services?**

Informing and involving parents in youth-based services meets the needs of many parents by providing an additional linkage between them and their children's lives. However, adverse circumstances often warrant greater involvement than youth-based services alone can provide. Parents who have academically or socially challenged youth, or youth currently in the probation system, may need additional services. Likewise, parents who are alcohol, tobacco, or other drug (ATOD) users, or who lack general parenting skills themselves often benefit from family-based services. Research has shown that for most youth, parents' attitudes about ATOD, connectedness with the youth, and degree of skill in family management affect parents' capacity to protect youth from the more powerful impact of perceived peer approval for ATOD use. In other words, parents typically don't promote youth ATOD use, but more often miss opportunities to proactively prevent it (Markwood, 1997). SDFSC family-based services often provide parents with the skills and opportunities to identify and prevent ATOD use in youth.

## What Does Research Say About Engaging Parents in Family-Based Services?

Systematic attempts to teach parenting skills have been documented since the early 1800s (Hess, 1980, as cited in Gorman & Balter, 1997). According to research, successful parent education programs have the following essential characteristics (Steif, 1993; Riley, 1994):

**Voluntary**—Parents who are voluntarily involved in programs are more receptive to changing their behavior (better communication skills, parenting skills, problem-solving skills, disciplinary skills, management skills, etc.) and are more likely to feel in control of their lives. However parenting programs that only involve one parent can disrupt family life and have a detrimental effect on marital relations (Henricson & Roker, 2000). Historically, programs have faced tremendous challenges recruiting male parents or caregivers due to their work schedules, reluctance from some mothers, or an image that youth or family-based services are for women. While the challenges are many, research shows that high father involvement decreases the chances that youth (grades 6-12) will be suspended or expelled from school (National Center for Educational Statistics [NCES], 1996).

### Successful Family-Based Services are:

- Voluntary
- Intensive
- Flexible
- Accessible
- Culturally sensitive
- Strength based
- Responsive

### Successful Family-Based Services have:

- Well trained staff
- Ongoing supervision
- Connection to other community services
- Creative recruitment strategies
- Various methods of service delivery

### Strategies for Recruiting and Retaining Male Caregivers in Family-Based Services:

- Provide male staff. Males feel more comfortable discussing personal needs with other males rather than with females.
- Train staff. Training on the importance of father involvement makes programs more father-friendly.
- Highlight services. During orientation or enrollment, highlight services for fathers and families, learn fathers' names, engage fathers in conversation, and invite them to participate in program events.
- Offer peer support for fathers. Be willing to adjust the structure, content, and timing of sessions based on fathers' interests and needs.
- Offer motivational supports. Food or t-shirts can keep them coming back.

**Flexible**—Successful programs gear content and methods to the interests and needs of parents and provide a variety of techniques for parents rather than a "one-way" approach. Sometimes this can be challenging to achieve when implementing a science-based curriculum.

### Examples...

- ✓ *Allow at least three guest presentations to supplement the curriculum. Then let the parents or caregivers select three speakers within the curriculum topic range to come and speak with them.*
- ✓ *Form small focus groups at the beginning of the program to assess parents' interests, strengths, and needs.*

**Accessible**—Successful programs are delivered in a variety of settings, including homes, schools, or community institutions, with transportation or childcare provided when needed.

### Examples...

- ✓ *Provide gas, bus, or taxi vouchers for program participants.*
- ✓ *Recruit additional staff to provide childcare services.*

- ✓ *Provide dinner. If funding does not allow for this, solicit donations or have pot-lucks.*
- ✓ *Outreach to local vendors (grocery stores, restaurants, laundromats) to donate.*
- ✓ *Link meetings to already scheduled activities to ensure a better turnout.*
- ✓ *Keep parents informed of the program through notes, telephone calls, phone trees, newsletters, conferences, and meetings.*

**Intensive**—Studies find more significant and sustained effects when interventions are frequent and occur over a long period of time. Short-term interventions with high-risk or in-crisis families are only temporary. Such efforts do not result in long-term functional changes within family systems. Although recruitment for long-term programs can be very difficult, once families are involved in a family intervention, they often do not want to terminate participation (Kumpfer, 1999). Evidence also indicates that programs encouraging families to hold weekly meetings after the program ends have the longest effectiveness—by offering a medium for changing internal family communication patterns in positive and enduring ways (Kumpfer, 1999).

**Intensive Programs Take Time...**

Time must be allowed for developing trust, determining the family's needs, providing or locating support services for basic needs, and comprehensively addressing deficit areas. To produce longitudinal effectiveness, the family intervention must be of sufficient dosage (**at least 45 hours with high-risk families**). **At least 30-40 contact hours are needed for a positive and lasting impact** from family programs, particularly because high-risk families frequently miss sessions and have difficulty implementing the skills taught at home. Some parent and family programs fail to have much impact, because they do not spend enough time on each skill or principle taught. Many parent education or training interventions fail with high-risk families because they are too short to really reduce risk-producing processes and behaviors and increase protective processes and behaviors in these parents. Short-term parent educational programs are essentially for low-risk families. These short-term programs stress that they must be short to attract parents to attend. While this assumption may be true for very busy working parents of children with few problems, it is not as true of high-risk or in-crisis families who want help (Kumpfer, 1999).

**Culturally Sensitive**—Successful programs value diversity and reflect an appreciation of the cultural and socioeconomic bases of parent behavior and belief while avoiding stereotyping.

*Examples...*

- ✓ *Use the power of culture to attract families by serving their culture's food.*
- ✓ *Use the media to target families who speak English as a second language. Provide interviews on the radio, television, and newspaper.*
- ✓ *Offer assistance in filling out complicated forms.*
- ✓ *If a class has a mix of parents who speak different languages, conduct trainings in groups by first language where parents can relate to each other.*
- ✓ *Provide mini-trainings on parenting in their language (e.g., communicating with your child).*
- ✓ *Utilize bi-lingual parents to assist in translation of curriculum materials.*
- ✓ *Have youth accompany parents and act as translators during meetings.*
- ✓ *Recruit staff who are similar to families they serve (e.g., culture, language, and ethnicity).*

**Strength Based**—Successful programs build on family strengths and seek to empower parents by encouraging them to find solutions to their own problems.

*Examples...*

- ✓ *Train staff to be facilitators rather than teachers.*
- ✓ *Have parents take ownership of the classes and give them control over various tasks, such as providing snacks for the class, coordinating schedules, etc.*

- ✓ *Provide icebreakers that allow parents to share their experiences with each other.*
- ✓ *Hire graduates of the program to conduct annual door-to-door assessments for program activities.*
- ✓ *Keep a collection of items (photographs, newsletters, quotes from parents) throughout the program. At the end, have the parents make a scrapbook of their experiences and let them add to it as they see fit. Then use the scrapbook as a recruitment tool in the future.*

**Responsive**—Effective programs respond to the unique needs of each family. Optimally, parents are involved in choosing service design and content.

*Examples...*

- ✓ *Make time to talk individually with each program participant. Is the program meeting their needs? If not, brainstorm with the parent what can be done (either within the class structure or through other support services) to assist them. Don't hesitate to continue the conversation via phone if appropriate.*
- ✓ *Accommodate working parents by scheduling meetings that are most convenient for them. A 6:00-7:30 time slot allows parents to get home from work in time for the meeting and get back home in time to eat a late meal.*
- ✓ *Set up a weekly "telephone hour" when parents can call for program information or with questions or suggestions. Make sure a staff member is present to answer the phone, not an answering machine.*
- ✓ *Set up a "buddy system" in which experienced parents support new parents.*

In addition to the characteristics listed above, successful family-based programs also have the following:

**A Well-trained Staff**—Effective programs are provided by staff who are well-versed in the subject matter, have excellent interpersonal and facilitative skills, and are sensitive to individual family needs. Riley (1994) noted that one review of 48 parent education program evaluations found that the skills of the staff was more important than the specific curriculum used.

**Steif (1993) also noted important staffing issues to consider include the following:**

- **Selection.** Successful programs use staff and community members who share the culture, language, or background of the target population.
- **Staff-parent relationships.** In successful programs, staff-parent relationships are collaborative and are built on trust, respect, and mutual understanding. These relationships blend education, practical assistance, and social support.
- **Training.** Successful programs provide training for staff on a regular basis and the opportunity for team building and frequent, ongoing communication.
- **Continuity.** Successful programs ensure continuity in the relationship that a parent has with a staff member in order to build trust and understanding. For example, the home visitor will always be the same person.

*Examples...*

- ✓ *If using a science-based curriculum, make sure all staff are properly trained and have ongoing contact with the program developers as questions and issues arise.*
- ✓ *Consider staffing program with former participants. Parents may be more at ease talking to other parents who have successfully graduated from the program and can share their experiences.*
- ✓ *Let families teach and educate staff on cultural issues, particularly how they adapted to modern American culture and how they are not adhering to generational stereotypes of American culture.*

- ✓ *Encourage staff to hold a debriefing after each session to assess how the session went, identify areas for improvement, and discuss parent needs.*

**Ongoing Supervision**—Effective programs provide staff with continuous, high-quality supervision and support. When necessary, assistance with recruitment, enrollment, finding/preparing a location, staffing, coordinating equipment/material needs, and childcare is provided

*Examples...*

- ✓ *Monitor a program session, taking notes about the interactions between staff and parents, whether questions were appropriately addressed, content delivered effectively, and parents felt supported. Afterwards hold a short follow-up session with staff to review your notes and provide feedback and input where appropriate.*
- ✓ *Periodically contact staff via phone or email to assess whether their needs are being met. Do they have adequate supplies and materials? Is their meeting location appropriate? Letting staff know they are supported and appreciated leads to less staff turnover.*

**Connection to Other Community Services**—Effective programs collaborate and coordinate with other community organizations to ensure that families are receiving all the services they need.

*Examples...*

- ✓ *Outreach to agencies that families have contact with, such as the low income housing authority, mental health services, church groups, or community groups.*
- ✓ *Outreach to various support groups for parents such as those for single parents, those in the grieving process, those for recovering alcoholics, and those for parents of children with ADD or asthma.*
- ✓ *Consider having speakers from other community service organizations come into the group and give presentation if appropriate.*

**Creative Recruitment Strategies**—Successful programs use a variety of recruitment strategies, including: personal contacts (usually door-to-door soliciting) as well as written materials; schools and other community agencies,(health agencies, child protective services, preschool programs, and social service agencies); actively recruiting first-time parents who tend to be the most responsive to training and the most committed to programs; and attempting to recruit fathers as well as mothers since outcomes for children are more positive when both parents participate in parenting education (Steif, 1993).

*Examples...*

- ✓ *Elicit support and ideas from families who have graduated from program. They often have innovative ideas about how to recruit other families.*
- ✓ *Support parents as they encourage other parents to join.*
- ✓ *Form an alumni parent group, which can recruit other family members such as siblings of the parents, etc.*
- ✓ *Approach community centers, PTA meetings, back-to-school nights, etc.*

**Various Methods of Service Delivery**—Successful programs use a variety of techniques to deliver services. These include home visits, discussion groups, instruction in child development, specific parenting training and advice, and parent-child interaction (Steif, 1993).

*Examples...*

- ✓ **Home visits.** Home visits allow the parent educator to give more individualized attention to the family, establish trust, and view family interactions in the home environment. They are especially important for reaching at-risk populations.
- ✓ **Discussion Groups.** The group format gives parents an opportunity to interact with other parents and to develop a supportive network. Parents are able to learn from each other, gain self-confidence, and develop social skills.
- ✓ **Instruction in child development.** Programs should provide parents with an understanding of realistic expectations for children at various developmental stages.
- ✓ **Specific parenting training and advice.** Programs use role-playing, modeling, and demonstrations rather than didactic instruction.
- ✓ **Parent-child interaction.** Parent-child interaction time provides parents a chance to practice new behaviors and receive feedback from staff and other adults.

Although many family-based service providers have a very poor turnout for their first attempts at implementing family programs, with increasing experience the retention rates can generally be significantly improved if barriers to attendance are reduced. An 80 to 85 percent retention rate is possible for most programs if transportation, meals or snacks, and childcare are provided (Aktan, 1995, as cited in Kumpfer, 1999). Recruitment rates will vary with the type of program, motivational supports, types of clients targeted, and time of day offered. While program length may be an issue in recruiting families, it is generally not an issue in retention, because many families do not want the program to end once they have attended more than three or four sessions. An ongoing parent support group or booster sessions can help address the need for continuation of the program (Kumpfer, 1999).

### **What are some general tips for providing culturally sensitive services to families?**

Many SDFSC programs are working with families from a variety of demographic and ethnic backgrounds. For many of these families, English is not the primary language spoken at home. According to 2000 U.S. Census figures, about 30 percent of Americans are non-white. By 2010, children of immigrants will make up 22 percent of the U.S. population. California is even more diverse than the nation as a whole. According to 2000 U.S. Census figures, about 53 percent of Californians are non-white. Of these, about 32 percent are Hispanic; 7 percent are African American; 11 percent are Asian; and about 1 percent are American Indian. If programs are to truly embrace the concept that “no child will be left behind,” culturally responsive staff development must be a priority (Landsverk, 2004), especially in California.

*If parent education is to be effective, it must be made not only available to all populations, but relevant and acceptable to all populations as well.*  
- Gorman & Balter

Understanding the cultural parenting assumptions of different ethnic groups participating in family-based services can improve program success. Many traditional cultures may have exceptionally strong ties to extended family members and may stress cooperation and sharing rather than competition and individual autonomy. Some cultures may exhibit a more

authoritarian approach to parenting with extremely high expectations for children's performance. Understanding why parents hold these values and their beliefs about children can help improve the program's effectiveness for these parents (Kumpfer, 1999). Below are some general guidelines to consider when working with multicultural and/or multiethnic family groups (Landsverk, 2004; Kumpfer, 1999):

- **Gender roles**—Traditionally, mothers have more involvement in issues concerning education/programs for children.
- **Family member roles**—Roles may vary depending on cultural differences. Often, children are expected to help support their families by going to work instead of to school, supplementing the family income with their earnings. Additionally, youth may take on a caregiver role for younger siblings.
- **Role of extended families**—Extended families often play a large role in youth's lives. The exclusion of extended family members is often not an option for program providers and should be taken into consideration when implementing services.
- **Services and siblings**—For many cultures, it is not uncommon for parents to bring other siblings to program services. Additional childcare may be required.
- **Language**—For many parents, English is not the primary language spoken. Being culturally sensitive to this by providing interpreters is necessary for successful program implementation.

Three main types of culturally sensitive programs have been identified (Gorman & Balter, 1997):

- **Translated**—A traditional parent education program that has been translated into a target population's native language.
- **Culturally adapted**—A program designed to incorporate, to a greater or lesser degree, the values and cultural traditions of the target population.
- **Culturally specific**—A program designed to incorporate the values of the target population, however the impetus for its creation is to facilitate successful parenting within a specific group's culture.

Most SDFSC programs use curriculum that were translated into the target population's native language or are considered to be culturally appropriate for a specific ethnic group. When the targeted population is composed of youth from cross-cultural backgrounds, the program may not fit the needs of all youth involved. In many instances, program staff rely on their own experiences without adequate research on multi-cultural implementation strategies. More research needs to be done to identify effective culturally specific and multi-cultural prevention practices. Below are some questions to consider when working with diverse populations (Messina, 1994):

- What gestures and body language commonly accompany communication? Is eye contact considered polite or rude? Is usual tone of voice soft or loud? How close do people stand when speaking to each other? Is touching acceptable?
- Do all members of the family have the same right to speak? Do some members have fewer rights? Are there gender differences? Do children speak freely or are they reserved?
- Is the family structure nuclear or extended? If extended, who is considered a member of the family? Do family members have to be living in the household?
- Who has authority in the home? Who has decision making roles?
- Are family members expected to be involved in other family members' decisions?

## SDFSC Interview with the Experts

We asked two of our prevention experts about culturally appropriate strategies for working with families and their specific recommendations. Rocco Cheng, Program Director at the Pacific Clinics-Asian Pacific Family Center, provided us with advice on working with Asian American families. Martha Madrid, Director of the Health Education and Mentoring Services for the Orange County Bar Foundation, gave us helpful hints for working with Latino/a families.

### Rocco Cheng - Pacific Clinics - Asian Pacific Family Center

**Language/Cultural Competence:** Many of the materials/instructors are not culturally and linguistically appropriate to Asian parents, hence they may not be able to relate to the class material.

Make the material and class culturally and linguistically appropriate for Asian parents. A focus group presenting some of the topics is one way to do this. In short, instead of prescribing a certain strategy of parenting, the facilitator may need to ask for a lot of input and feedback from parents to make sure the material makes sense and is appropriate. Also, asking for the similarities and differences between the two cultures will be helpful to engage parents.

Recruiting bi-lingual staff, is easier in California (especially in Los Angeles and San Francisco where there is a large Asian population). Consider going through mental health related programs and Asian study programs at local colleges to recruit students or graduates. You might also contact Asian mental health organizations such as the Asian American Psychological Association (AAPA) or your local Asian service/political coalitions. If all else fails, you might use Asian newspapers and place an ad.

**Shame/Face Issue:** Families and parents do not want people to feel that they do a poor job educating/raising their children. Attending the parenting workshop or class may give them a negative impression as they may think people will perceive them as inadequate.

To engage Asian parents, empathize with what they have been through as normal processes and give them a sense of hope that they can work through these issues. Invite parents to share their cultural/immigration experience and how the American way of raising children is not making sense to them.

**Denial:** Parents may feel that the struggle is common and normal and may not be indicative of any serious problem they have with their youth. Hence, there is no need to talk to people outside of the family about these issues.

Encourage Asian parents to recognize the "common" struggles they're experiencing with their youth. Then suggest ways to improve the relationship or communication with their youth or to do so to prevent future problems. That way, parents will not feel that they are doing a bad job of being a parent. In other words, "normalize," then suggest ways to improve.

## *SDFSC Interview with the Experts*

### Martha Madrid - Orange County Bar Foundation

#### **Some of the bigger issues we have faced when working with Latino families have been:**

**Transportation:** Keep in mind your location may not be on a direct bus route, which could add up to two additional hours of time. Traveling by public transportation with an infant, stroller, diaper bag, and toddler is extremely difficult. If the meeting location requires extensive directions to find (Kaiser Hospital, third floor, meeting room B, in nurses lounge) you may lose participants along the way who are not fluent with the language or who are illiterate in their own language and miss any posted signs.

Transportation also requires parking meters, garage fees, etc. Many may not possess a valid driver's license or insurance and will not risk being stopped unless it is an absolute emergency. California has strict laws about car and booster seats as well.

**Discipline:** Parents born outside the U.S. generally grew up with corporal punishment and strict rules of behavior, enforced by their parents. When talking about discipline, begin by stating what the law considers abuse and what is reasonable and allowed in California. Parents often feel that their authority has been undermined because their children know more about child abuse laws, and they use it to threaten or intimidate parents (i.e., "If you hit me I'll call the cops on you!" "If you don't let me go, I'll tell the cops you hit me and they'll deport you!") Give parents plenty of useful substitutions for physical punishment. Role playing is especially helpful to keep control.

It is not uncommon for fathers to deliberately avoid giving verbal praise or showing physical affection. A nice icebreaker is to have a parent introduce their child and state something positive about her or him.

**Childcare:** Many Latino families may be able and willing to attend but need childcare. Many parents will not leave their children with someone they or the children do not know. Childcare costs may be prohibitive. Families may live in situations that are not "safe" to leave even older children/teens without parental supervision.

**Motivational Supports:** Provide parents with local family "things to do" that are FREE. Many fathers may have two jobs or a weekend job in addition to their full-time position during the week. This doesn't allow for quality time with the kids. They may be too tired to do much outside of recuperating for the next work shift, and if money is tight recreation is the first to go.

**Traditional Families:** Women and mothers may adhere to traditional roles in the family setting: dinner at a certain time and caretakers not only for their own children, but also for grandchildren, nieces/nephews, aging parents. They may have extended family members who require food or laundry preparation in order to work a second or night shift. Some circumstances might need both parents or the approval of the father figure in order to make a decision.

**Group Size:** Keep the group size small; it can be intimidating to speak up in front of so many other parents. Latinos don't like to air their dirty laundry. Ask parents to share what success they have had with their children in specific areas such as getting to bed on time, doing homework, friends, helping with chores, and keeping tobacco and drug free.

**Language / Cultural Competence:** Is the function presented in their native language? Are they losing anything in the translation? Is the translation simultaneous? Or do they have to wait to get the information secondhand? Are visuals culturally appropriate? Being comfortable in the setting makes a world of difference. Remember, not all Latinos celebrate Cinco de Mayo or September 16th.

## SDFSC Grantee Success Stories

### Solano County

**Parent Component:** Program staff implemented the family education curriculum Families and Schools Together [FAST] that targets students exhibiting anti-social behavior and poor school performance. The program includes parent-to-parent time, communication activities, family song, greeting, meal served to parents by youth, 1:1 time between parent and “special” child, etc. The program was very successful with Latino families. Graduated families are starting FAST Works programs at school sites to continue program. Families volunteer to work at the school, initiated a Teachers’ Wish List, and hosted fundraising events to purchase items on the wish list.

**Challenges:** Component was extremely successful at two school sites, but unsuccessful at one school site. Lack of buy-in from school principal was a main factor. Program coordinator noted that one of the biggest challenges for staff (teachers) was having them step away from their teacher role and let the parents/youth lead themselves.

**Lessons Learned:** Support of principal and school staff is essential. Offer staff stipends to run program sites. Every participating family was recognized via a gift basket during the program, which included a food voucher. The family had to use the food voucher to host the main entrée for the following week’s session. Families took pride in the entrées they brought. Program staff noted that a strength of the FAST program was allowing families to run the program while the teachers acted as facilitators. Program staff personally contacted each family once a week to touch base and remind them of upcoming activities. A staff member was always present to greet families.

### San Mateo County

**Parent Component:** South Coast Children's Services, Project Horizons, is part of the San Mateo County Coastside Partnership Grant. The parent component consists of three parent education workshops per year. Youth within SCCS, Project Horizons, brainstormed the topics for the workshops at their monthly meeting. Youth are also responsible for parent outreach development for attendance of these workshops.

**Challenges:** Parent education also exists with the school district Migrant Education program, the Family Resource Center’s Even Start program, and English as a Second Language classes. These additional parent education resources in a small community provide conflict with our target population.

**Lessons Learned:** South Coast Children's Services, Project Horizons, provides services in a rural area of San Mateo County. The program goal of 30 parents in attendance at workshops in this geographically remote area is challenging. We have learned that a core of six parents has followed through with our parent education workshops, and they have requested the topic for their next workshop: discipline and adolescents. We learned that parents responded more to adults than youth when it comes to outreach for these workshops. The parent component is valuable in this grant. The six parents who have attended have expressed a sense of isolation in dealing with their adolescents. These workshops have provided insight and tools for parents on adolescent development.

## Conclusion

Historically prevention service providers have faced significant challenges in their attempts to inform parents and engage them in program services. As discussed in this brief, some common themes include difficulty establishing and maintaining connections with parents, limited experience in engaging parents in the planning and implementation of services, and cultural and linguistic differences. By considering the insights and ideas presented here, programs can be better equipped to inform and engage parents and families. The following are some questions to ask when developing and evaluating a program:

- How are parents involved in the program planning process?
- What methods have/will be used to solicit parental feedback? (i.e., surveys, focus groups)
- How often will parental input or involvement occur? (initial or ongoing)
- How is parental feedback utilized to guide SDFSC program development and implementation?
- What are the expected challenges associated with involving parents?
- How receptive have parents, schools, and other “key stakeholders” been thus far? How could this be improved?

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Notes on *Prevention Brief*, Vol. 1 No. 1:

“Principles for Informing and Engaging Parents” was written by Belinda Basca, CARS consultant. Ms. Basca is a K-5 curriculum writer of Science CompanionT, a hands-on learning program that takes advantage of children's extensive knowledge of—and curiosity about—how things work in the world. As a consultant for EMT and CARS, Belinda has assisted on a variety of mentoring projects and conducted site visits for Friday Night Live Mentoring and the Safe and Drug Free Schools and Community program.

As a former researcher at Harvard Project Zero on The Understandings of Consequence Project, Ms. Basca's work focused on complex causal science concepts and their application in the classroom. In particular, she studied how children reason about challenging topics in science at the elementary and middle school level. She developed science curriculum and conducted frequent classroom observations of teachers and interviews with children.

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