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Rural Education Research Digest

Knoche, L. L., Edwards, C. P., Sheridan, S. M., Kupzyk, K. A., Marvin, C. A., Cline, K. D., & Clarke, B. L. (In Press). Getting Ready: Results of a randomized trial of a relationship-focused intervention on the parent-infant relationship in rural Early Head Start. *Infant Mental Health Journal*.

Early childhood experiences contribute to school readiness and later academic success. Parental engagement and involvement play a large role in shaping these experiences. Healthy environmental supports and positive interactions can be promoted through positive parent-child and parent-professional relationships in early childhood settings.

Past research has linked parent-child relationships characterized by warmth, affection, sensitivity and support for children's autonomy with improved cognitive and social outcomes. Additionally, language and literacy interactions with parents and home environments with enriched learning opportunities support improved academic outcomes. Moreover, partnerships between parents and professionals support family engagement and result in increased provision of family-centered services. The Getting Ready intervention is an ecological, strengths-based approach that combines triadic and collaborative strategies to support early childhood success by improving both the parent-child and parent-professional relationships.

The present study examined the effects of the Getting Ready intervention on families with children between two and 36 months of age in a rural Midwestern Early Head Start program. Two hundred and thirty-four families participated in this study. Within each of three community agencies, 64 early childhood professionals were randomly assigned to either the control or intervention condition. Families were assigned to the same conditions as their childhood professionals. Training and coaching in the Getting Ready strategies were provided to all professionals assigned to the intervention condition. These strategies included guiding parents to interact in warm and supportive ways with their child, support their child's autonomy, and participate in their children's learning. Parent response was measured with coded variables on the Parent/Caregiver Involvement Scale collected via longitudinal, videotaped parent-child observations. Data from the study were analyzed using multi-level modeling.

Overall, the Getting Ready strategies resulted in improved parenting practices for families in rural Early Head Start. Specifically, treatment group participants displayed not only significantly more warmth/sensitivity and encouragement of autonomy, but also offered more appropriate support for learning and guidance/directives to their children. Future research should investigate how these improvements in parenting practices influence cognitive and social-emotional outcomes, along with additional moderating variables that may help answer the question of what works for whom (e.g., geographic location).