PROJECT INFORMATION

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Implementing and Evaluating a Program to Support Positive Parenting Behaviors

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Organization

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What was the research about?

State child protective services, or CPS, agencies provide services to parents who are reported for child abuse or neglect. These services try to improve the relationship between the parent and child. They also encourage positive behaviors to prevent abuse or neglect.

In this study, the research team compared a program called SafeCare with the usual services parents receive from CPS agencies. SafeCare taught parents how to

- Identify and treat symptoms of illness and injury
- Remove home hazards
- Build a positive parent-child relationship

What were the results?

After six months, parents who received SafeCare and parents who received usual services didn't differ in

- Parenting knowledge and stress
- Positive parenting behaviors
- Quality of parent-child relationships
- Parent and child well-being
- How structured home life was
- How often the family met its social, medical, and financial needs

However, four of the nine agencies in the study had serious problems offering SafeCare and enrolling parents. In interviews, some agency staff said SafeCare didn't meet the needs of parents. Also, some agencies had little support for offering SafeCare. Parent feedback about SafeCare was mostly positive. Many parents noted that the sessions helped them practice new skills.

Who was in the study?

The study included 285 parents receiving services from one of nine agencies in four states. Of these parents, 75 percent were white, 13 percent were black, and 7 percent were Latino. The average age was 30, and 87 percent were women. All parents had at least one child under age five.

What did the research team do?

The research team assigned service providers, by chance, to receive training on SafeCare or continue usual services. Parents received SafeCare or usual services based on their provider's assignment.

Service providers visited the homes of parents in SafeCare. Home visits occurred every one to two weeks for a total of 18 to 20 education sessions. SafeCare taught parents skills about child health, home safety, and the parent-child relationship. Parents receiving usual services met with service providers every one to two weeks, as needed. Meetings took place in parents' homes or at the agency. Providers gave support and referrals. They also helped parents address day-to-day problems.

Parents took a survey about parenting skills at the start of the study and again six months later. The research team also interviewed agency staff and parents about SafeCare.

Parents, social workers, and CPS staff helped plan the study and enroll parents.

What were the limits of the study?

Because of the problems in offering SafeCare, results may not be certain. Also, 39 percent of parents didn't fill out the survey at the end of the study. These

problems may have made it hard to see differences between parents who were and weren't in SafeCare.

Future research could look at other ways to support parents receiving services from CPS agencies.

How can people use the results?

CPS agencies can use these results when considering ways to support parents who receive services.

To learn more about this project, visit www.pcori.org/Whitaker239.