Strengthening Child-Caregiver Relationships: Linking Evidence and Practice

Child-Caregiver Relationships Across Ages and Stages.
The Early Stages Presentation at PEPFAR meeting 11th – 13th December.

Overview of Presentation

1. Brief introduction of The Parent Centre and its programs.
2. Overall program approach
3. Programs that focus on early stages – very briefly
4. Priority child Outcomes
5. Research – Parent-Infant Home visiting Intervention Program
1. **The Parent Centre**

- Established in 1983
- It strives to contribute to a society in which every parent/caregiver is able to raise resilient and well-balanced children in ways in which they can develop their full potential, protected from victimization and abuse in communities free from violence.

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Helping Children Through Positive Parenting
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2(a). **Overall Program Approach to Parenting**

- Parents have an important task in parenting the children in their care.
- Parenting is tough at the best of times and especially difficult when parents are struggling with survival needs and safety concerns.
- The quality of the parent/child relationship will influence the quality of later relationships in the child’s life.
FOCUS ON IMPORTANCE OF MEETING DEVELOPMENTAL NEEDS OF THE CHILD

“Children become violent when important aspects of their developmental needs, especially their emotional needs, are not met. For example, when caregivers are not sensitive or responsive to children’s feelings or don’t provide children with limits and rules for their behaviour. As a result, the child’s personal and social behaviour can become disturbed, frequently attention-getting, including acts of aggression and violence to get attention.”
Professor Linda Richter (2002)

2(c) Overall Program approach to parents

Religion

Parent chooses an option

A number of options

Developmental needs, skills

Strength based

Experience

Information Sharing

Culture
3. PROGRAMS

- Individual Counselling – Zero – 3 Counselling
- Parent-Infant Home-visiting Intervention Programme
- Support groups for mothers with infants and toddlers
- Effective discipline with pre-schoolers
- Teen- Parenting Programme
- The Parenting & Leadership Training of Trainers Programme
- Mentoring and Support Programme
- Child Behaviour Management, for all those who work with children
- Workshops on various parenting issues
- Support groups for parents of older children
- Fatherhood workshops
- The Positive Parenting Skills Training Programme
- Between Parent & Teenager – closing the gap
- Grand-parenting – parenting second time around
3(A). **INDIVIDUAL COUNSELING**

**counselling is painstaking work trying to get a balance between supporting the parent and being the voice of the child.”** Anita Grant

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**ZERO – 3 COUNSELING**

- A specialised counseling service for parents with their infants and toddlers between 0-3
- It involves sessions with the parent and child
- **Aim:**
  - To help parents understand the difficulties they experience
  - To bring focus to child’s developmental needs while focusing on where parent is at.
  - To provide knowledge and awareness of infant mental health
3(b) Parent-Infant Home-Visiting Intervention

- Support of ‘at risk’ mothers thus improving the chances of a positive attachment between mothers and their newborn infants.

- Prenatal and postnatal home visiting to pregnant women who are a high risk for antenatal and postnatal depression, child neglect, abuse and abandonment.

- Early Parenting Talks at Maternity and Obstetric Units which serve such women as well as support groups for them and their infants and older children.

- 11 communities
4. **Priority Child Outcomes**

- Children develop secure attachments to primary caregiver
- Children have positive relationships with others in their lives
- Children have healthy self-esteem and care enough about themselves to make healthy choices.
- Children who are resilient - able to face and overcome challenges in their lives.
- Children who will reach their full potential

5. *(a)* **What we have learnt through experience (What works)**

- Indigenous counselors and facilitators with parenting experience provide an invaluable resource in vulnerable communities
- Knowledge of and Sensitivity to culture, traditions and religious practices
CARING FOR THE CARER

WHAT WE HAVE LEARNT ABOUT WORKFORCE THROUGH EXPERIENCE (CONT)

- Selection process
- Intensive training
- Supervision & Support:
  - Supervisors professionally qualified: Experts in Infant Mental Health; qualified Social workers, Clinical Psychologists
- Capacity building
- Wellness events
**CHALLENGES: WOUNDED HEALERS**

Striking a balance between the needs of the staff member and job requirements

- **SELF-ESTEEM**
  - to believe that he/she is a person of worth.
- **LOVE**
  - from family, from friends, self-love.
- **BELONGING**
  - to a group of friends, to his/her family, to society at large.
- **SAFETY**
  - having others protect him/her from harm.
- **PHYSICAL NEEDS**
  - warmth, food, shelter, clothing.

**5(B) RESEARCH**

- **PARENT-INFANT HOME-VISITING**:
- 1995 - 1997
  “Improving quality of mother-infant relationship and infant attachment in socio-economically deprived community in South Africa: a randomised control trial.”
- Peter Cooper, Mark Tomlinson, Leslie Swartz, Mireille Landman, Chris Molteno, Alan Stein, Kim McPherson, Lynne Murray

British Medical Journal
THE INTERVENTION

Purpose was to promote sensitive and responsive parenting and secure infant attachment to the mother.
- Intervention group 224; control group 229
- Intervention delivered from late pregnancy and for 6 months after birth
- 16 sessions- 2 ante nataly and 14 post nataly
- Quality of mother-infant relationship was measured at 6 months & 12 months
- Infant attachment security at measured at 18 months

RESULTS

Mother-Infant interaction
- Mothers in intervention program interacted more sensitively to the infants at 6 months postpartum and later at 12 mths follow up, than those in the control group.

Infant attachment
- Greater proportion of infants of these mothers were rated as securely attached.

Maternal depression
- Although lower but not significantly
RESULTS

- A home-based mother-infant intervention, delivered by trained lay therapists in the context of socio-economic disadvantage, has positive benefits for both maternal responsiveness and children’s emotional development.

OUR RESPONSE TO THE RESEARCH

- This intervention, while regarded as quite costly and labour intensive, in our experience is very necessary with the most at risk families who do not approach social services for help.
- Started implementing in 1998 and rolled out the program to 11 communities - as we could already see positive results.
- Made adjustments to intervention
  ✓ 2 antenatal visits → 5
  ✓ 14 postnatal visits → 15
THANK YOU