The Achievement Gap Initiative
at Harvard University
19 June 2007

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**Key Principle**

Aligning resources to enable families to accomplish the tasks that support children in learning in school should guide our development and deployment of programs to narrow the achievement gap from a family perspective.
In 1990, we believed that parental influence diminished as peer influence increased in adolescence...

...today, we understand that parents are as critical during adolescence as they were in childhood, even as peer influence increases.

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Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health (2005)
Risks for Depression

**Specific:**
- Extensive family history of depression, especially parents
- Prior history of depression
- Depressogenic cognitive style
- Bereavement

**General** *(Risks for many disorders)*
- Exposure to trauma
- Poverty
- Social isolation
- Job loss
- Unemployment
- Family breakup
- Loss of community
- Dislocation / immigration
- Historical trauma
Depression’s Impact: Four Levels

1. Individual with diagnosis
2. Family of individual
3. Caregiver / Care System
4. Community – School, Friends, Neighborhood
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year Range</th>
<th>Study Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1979 - 1985</td>
<td>Risk Assessment - Children of Parents with Mood Disorders</td>
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<tr>
<td>1983 - 1987</td>
<td>Resiliency Studies and Intervention Development</td>
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<tr>
<td>1989 - 1991</td>
<td>Pilot Comparison of Public Health Interventions</td>
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<tr>
<td>1991 - 2000</td>
<td>Randomized Trial Comparing Psychoeducational Family Interventions for Depression</td>
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<tr>
<td>1997 - 1999</td>
<td>Family CORE in Dorchester</td>
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<tr>
<td>1998</td>
<td>Narrative Reconstruction</td>
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<tr>
<td>2000</td>
<td>Efficacy to Effectiveness</td>
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</tbody>
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Seven Different Implementations of Family Depression Approach

1. Randomized trial pilot – Dorchester for single parent families of color
2. Development of a program for Latino families
3. Large scale country wide implementation – Finland
4. Head Start – Program for parental adversity / depression
5. Blackfeet Nation – Head Start
6. Costa Rica
7. Collaboration with other investigators in new preventive interventions
Characteristics of Resilient Youth

- Activities - Intense Involvement in Age Appropriate Developmental Challenges - in School, Work, Community, Religion, and Culture

- Relationships - Deep Commitment to Interpersonal Relationships - Family, Peers, and Adults Outside the Family

- Self-Understanding - Self-Reflection and Understanding in Action
Resilience in Parents

- Commitment to parenting
- Openness to self-reflection
- Commitment to family connections and growth of shared understanding
Criteria for Intervention

Development

1. Compatible with a range of theoretical orientations and to be used by a wide range of health care practitioners

2. Strong cognitive orientation

3. Inclusion of a family as a whole

4. Integration of the different experiences of a family, that is, parents and child(ren)

5. Developmental perspective
**Core Elements of the Intervention**

1. Assessment of all family members
2. Presentation of psychoeducational material (e.g., affective disorder, child risk, and child resilience)
3. Linkage of psychoeducational material to the family’s life experience
4. Decreasing feelings of guilt and blame in the children
5. Helping the children develop relationships (inside and outside the family) to facilitate independent functioning in school and in activities outside the home
Latino Adaptation

- **Familismo**
- **Allocentric orientation**
- **Kinds of separation in immigrant families**
- **Differing involvement of parents and children in the mainstream culture**
What helps parents cope with depression?

- Focus on the children
- Visualizations. Envisioning a better future
- Prayer, songs, religion, church community, spiritual healing
- Support groups
- Helping others, sharing information
- Focusing in the present: “viviendo de día a día” (living day to day)
- Not giving up: “seguir la lucha”
- Alternative medicine
- Humor: “al mal tiempo buena cara” “yo no lloro, yo me río”
Head Start Family Connections
Project Partners

Boston ABCD
Dimock Health Center
Ruggles-Gilday Day Care Center
Federal Head Start Bureau
The Family Connections Approach

1. Emphasize the positive ways that all parents can enhance their parenting & their interactions with Head Start
2. Foster engagement with Head Start among depressed parents
3. Incorporate a program for getting appropriate treatment
4. Enhance parents’ & children’s classroom interactions through consultation, teaching and support for Head Start staff.
Family Connections Partnership

- Training & support for staff
- Partnerships for referral & networking
- Consultation/intervention in the classroom
- Stress support groups for parents
- Expanded home visitation & consultation
- Preventive relational friendship building for children
- Example: sessions that relate to mental health with an emphasis on depression
“Of all the forms of inequality, injustice in health care is the most shocking and inhumane.”

Reverend Martin Luther King, Jr.
References


References
