



Guidelines for Fidelity in Curriculum Implementation

A key objective of the Oregon Parenting Education Collaborative (OPEC) initiative is to ensure that *all Oregon parents will have access to high quality, proven programs*. In order to meet this objective, OPEC grantees are required to use evidence-based curricula series and implement them with fidelity.

Evidence-Based Programs

What does it mean for a curriculum to be evidence-based?

An evidence-based curriculum is defined as a curriculum that has shown, through rigorous evaluation and empirical studies, to significantly affect participants when correctly implemented^{1, 17}. There are many advantages to using and implementing evidence-based parenting curricula. Research and evaluation have documented the significant benefits of using evidence-based curricula:

- *Evidence-Based Curricula Meet Rigorous Criteria:* Evidence-based curricula must meet specific criteria, including empirical standards, to be certified as an evidence-based program¹⁸. Empirical standards can be defined as demonstrating efficacy through rigorous randomized control trials and peer-reviewed evaluations such as publication^{3, 15}. Meeting empirical standards indicates that a curriculum has produced positive results, has been reviewed by field experts, and is endorsed by a federal agency or research organization¹⁵. Because certified evidence-based curricula have gone through various evaluations and empirical studies, such programs are more likely to produce positive impacts than non-evidence-based curricula²². In addition, use of evidence-based curricula reduces the possibility of negative or unintended effects^{22, 25}.
- *Guidelines for Choosing the “Right” Program:* Evidence-based curricula provide specific guidelines about their purpose and target audience as well as guidelines for proper implementation based on empirical evidence and evaluation. Access to empirical information can help practitioners make informed decisions about which curriculum best meets the needs and goals of specific populations.

Is there a difference in outcomes for parents attending evidence-based versus non-evidence-based series?

Although OPEC requires use of evidence-based curricula, grantees also report data for non-evidence-based programs that are offered using alternative funding sources or implemented by community partners. During the 2013-2014 program year, Multivariate Analyses of Variance (MANOVAs) with pairwise contrasts were used to assess the relative impact of different parenting education curricula. Overall, participants reported increased parenting and child skills after completing a parenting education series, regardless of the curriculum used. However, parents who attended evidence-based curricula^a series reported a 24% greater increase in their children’s skills compared to parents who attended non-evidence-based curricula series²⁰.

Where can lists of evidence-based curricula be found?

The following federal agencies host national registries for evidence-based programs:

^a Evidence-based curricula included *Make Parenting A Pleasure*, *Nurturing Parenting*, *The Incredible Years*, *Parenting: the First Three Years*, *Parenting Now!*, *Abriendo Puertas*, *Active Parenting*, and *Parents As Teachers*.

- Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention
<http://www.ojjdp.gov/mpg/>
- U.S. Department of Health and Human Services Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services National Registry of Evidence-based Programs and Practices (NREPP)
<http://nrepp.samhsa.gov/>
- U.S. Department of Health and Human Services Administration for Children & Families Home Visiting Evidence of Effectiveness
<http://homvee.acf.hhs.gov/>

Which curricula are most often used by OPEC?

- *Abriendo Puertas (Opening Doors)*
- *Active Parenting Now*
- *Make Parenting a Pleasure (Haga de la Paternidad un Placer)^c*
- *Nurturing Parenting*
- *Parenting Inside Out*
- *Parenting Now!^b*
- *Parenting Wisely*
- *Parenting: The First Three Years*
- *Parents as Teachers*
- *The Incredible Years*

What if there is not an evidence-based curriculum that meets the needs of culturally diverse families in my community?

Parenting happens in a cultural and historical context, and the meaning of parenting can change based on the cultural context¹⁸. Numerous reports address the needs and challenges associated with developing, adapting, and implementing parenting education curricula in a way that balances cultural sensitivity, program adaptation, and implementation with fidelity to assure program outcomes^{10, 13, 16}. Because most parenting education programs were not designed for culturally and ethnically diverse families, previous research has highlighted the need to further understand the role of culture in parenting education programs.

However, many evidence-based programs have shown success with participants from various cultural backgrounds¹⁶. Through empirical studies and evaluation, the effectiveness of curricula with culturally diverse families can be documented. For example, *The Incredible Years* parenting program has shown effectiveness with African American, Caucasian, Latino, Asian, East African, Canadian, and British children²². In addition, the developers of evidence-based curricula often provide support for adapting a curriculum to meet the needs of a specific population without changing the primary purpose of the curriculum and maintaining the likelihood of program effectiveness^{16, 21}.

OPEC allows flexibility in meeting the needs of culturally diverse audiences if an evidence-based curriculum is not available for a specific targeted audience. Exceptions can be made when an organization can make a case that there is not an evidence-based curriculum available and suitable for their target population. For example, some OPEC grantees have used research-based curricula to meet the needs of Native American families (i.e., *Positive Indian Parenting*) and grandparents or other relatives raising the children of kin (i.e., *Parenting A Second Time Around*). If an OPEC site has a need to use a non-evidence-based, but research-based or evidence-informed curriculum, they should contact the Oregon State University technical assistance team.

Implementation Fidelity

^b *Parenting Now* as a direct derivative of MPAP is included as an accepted curriculum based on the evidence above.

^c *Make Parenting a Pleasure (MPAP)* was included as a Promising Program on the first national registry for parenting education programs, Strengthening Families. Due to a lack of funding, the registry's closed in 1999 http://www.strengtheningfamilies.org/html/programs_1999/programs_list_1999.html. MPAP is currently being evaluated in a randomized clinical trial (treatment and control groups). Preliminary results of the evaluation show significant improvement over the control group in the reduction of postnatal depression, and increased parenting skills and understanding child development and behavior, suggesting that MPAP is especially effective in these areas. This study is funded in part by the Education Development Center, on behalf of the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA).

Implementation of parenting education curricula with fidelity has been extensively documented as a fundamental mechanism for assuring program quality, program effectiveness, and positive outcomes^{7, 17, 24}.

What does implementing with fidelity mean?

The degree to which the program curriculum is implemented as it was intended by developers^{7, 14}.

Why is it important to implement with fidelity?

A program is more likely to have the same effects if it is implemented according to the original program design. Higher levels of fidelity predict greater parent engagement, higher attendance, and improvements in parenting practices². A review of over 500 empirical studies indicated that programs implemented with greater fidelity led to greater positive program outcomes. For example, the magnitude of potential change on positive outcomes is two to three times higher when programs are implemented with fidelity⁶.

What are the key components in maintaining program fidelity?

Although each curriculum is unique, research is consistent in indicating that programs implemented with fidelity include an emphasis on five key components^{12, 17, 19}.

1. Program Integrity Maintenance

Maintaining a program’s integrity requires that it is delivered in a way that is consistent with the developers’ model^{12, 17}. This includes the core content, methods, and key activities. Although adaptation may be necessary, it is important to understand the potential risks of the adapting program curricula. For example, eliminating program content and reducing the number of program sessions can reduce the effectiveness of a program, whereas adding materials such as culturally relevant examples and materials that do not change the purpose of the sessions may actually improve program outcomes¹⁷.

2. Program Duration and Exposure

Program duration refers to the number of sessions (i.e. dosage/exposure/intensity), frequency, length of the sessions, and participant attendance¹². It is essential not only to implement the number of sessions prescribed by the program model, but also to document the actual attendance of participants and to ensure sessions are of an appropriate length (program not too long or too short)⁴. Participants with greater exposure or higher dosage are more likely to experience positive outcomes^{2, 5, 8, 19}.

When implementing series using OPEC funds the following table indicates the LEAST number of sessions per series for each curriculum:

Curriculum	Least # of sessions for OPEC funded series
<i>Abriendo Puertas (Opening Doors)</i>	10
<i>Active Parenting Now (4th Edition)</i>	6
<i>Make Parenting a Pleasure (Haga de la Paternidad un Placer)</i>	10
<i>Nurturing Parenting</i>	12
<i>Nurturing Parenting ABCs</i>	7
<i>Parenting Now!</i>	7
<i>Parenting: The First Three Years</i>	10 sessions per each of the 3 age-based series
<i>The Incredible Years</i>	12

It is also important that sessions are the length (i.e. 1.5 or 2 hours) and frequency (i.e. once per week) recommended by the vendor. The majority of the curricula include homework and activities for parents to practice with their children. Therefore it is important that parents have not only the time to complete the homework and practice new skills but also the opportunity to reflect on the experience.

3. Staffing & Quality Delivery

The quality of delivery refers to the manner in which the program is presented to participants and focuses on the facilitator/provider’s effectiveness^{5, 7, 12}. Programs should follow the curriculum vendors recommendations for the

number of staff required for implementing the series. In addition, there should be a plan for how a program will handle situations such as the sudden illness or an emergency that necessitates the use of a substitute facilitator.

Facilitators play a key role in fidelity of implementation because they are responsible for the quality of the program delivery¹⁷. Aspects of delivery include facilitator's preparedness, ability to deliver program content, level of content knowledge, confidence to answer questions, and communication and interaction style⁷. It is necessary to provide facilitators with the adequate training and post-training support to assure that they understand the critical components of a program and maintain a high quality of delivery⁹. **For OPEC-funded programs, facilitators must be trained in the curriculum by the vendor or a trainer endorsed by vendor.** Additionally, assuring that program facilitators are committed, comfortable with the material, and have the knowledge and ability to answer questions are essential to assuring the highest level of program quality and achieving program outcomes^{17, 23, 24}. Facilitators' "soft skills" such interaction style, enthusiasm, positive attitude, respectfulness, confidence, and communication style are significant and of equal importance to assure program quality and positive outcomes²⁴.

In the evaluation of the OPEC-funded programs, factors such as the matching facilitator-participant ethnicity as well as familiarity with the community being served has been reported as a mechanisms leading to positive outcomes for parent recruitment and participant satisfaction.

4. Parent Engagement

Participants' engagement refers to the level of interest, perceptions of usefulness, and willingness to engage in discussion and participate in activities^{5, 12}. Participant engagement is key, as highly engaged parents are more likely to participate in activities and change their behavior²⁴.

5. Program Differentiation

Program differentiation refers to the unique features or components that make a program distinct from other similar programs. Each program has unique components that are targeted to specific populations and/or outcomes. For example, a parenting skills program may include two unique components: general information about child development and specific discipline strategies. These components are unique, but both are related to improving parenting skills. The ability to identify unique program components can help to explain the specific ways in which program outcomes are achieved⁷.

Can curricula be modified and still be implemented with fidelity?

Program adaptations are often sought because of a variety of circumstances including the unique needs of culturally and ethnically diverse families, lack of funding, timing, community partner preferences, etc. However, adaptations may have a negative effect on the outcomes for parents participating in the program. Guidelines addressing acceptable and unacceptable adaptations assure that changes do not jeopardize program effectiveness. *What Works Wisconsin – Research to Practice Series*¹⁷ has provided one of the best examples of guidelines for acceptable and unacceptable adaptations:

Acceptable Adaptations:

- Changing language—translation and/or modifying vocabulary
- Replacing images to show youth and families that look like target audience
- Replacing cultural references
- Modifying some aspects of activities such as physical contact
- Adding relevant, evidence-based content to make the program more appealing to participants

Risky or Unacceptable Adaptations:

- Reducing the number of sessions
- Reducing the length of sessions or length of participant involvement
- Lowering the level of participant engagement
- Eliminating key messages or skills to be learned
- Removing key topics
- Changing theoretical approach
- Using staff or volunteers who are not trained or qualified

- Using fewer staff members than recommended

How can OPEC grantees monitor the fidelity of curriculum implementation?

OPEC grantees have a responsibility to monitor OPEC-funded program implementation to ensure fidelity and avoid program drift across their implementation sites and facilitators. The first step in monitoring implementation is to be familiar with the vendor's fidelity requirements for each curriculum being used by your site. Additional tools and resources have been designed for use by OPEC grantees.

In 2013 and 2014, The Ford Family Foundation invested in an overarching study of OPEC Hubs' use of best practices in parenting education. The study was conducted by RMC Research with consultation from Oregon State University. As a result of the study, a user guide, *How to Rate Fidelity to Best Practices in Parenting Education*, was created. The user guide can be found on the OPEC website (www.orparenting.org) under the *Grantee Resources* tab. The comprehensive tool includes best practices for parenting education in six areas:

- Parenting Educator Competencies
- Professional Development
- Service Delivery
- Curriculum Characteristics and Content
- Organizational Management and Capacity
- Ongoing Assessment and Quality Improvement

In 2015, a shortened tool specific to curriculum implementation was developed. The *Fidelity Rating Short Tool* is available for project coordinators and administrators to use as part of their program planning and implementation. It can also be used as a method to monitor OPEC-funded programs being implemented by sub-contractors. The *Fidelity Rating Short Tool* is available as both a fillable pdf and an electronic survey form. The pdf version is available on the OPEC website (www.orparenting.org) under the *Grantee Resources* tab.

In addition, the shortened tool has been modified into a *Fidelity Checklist for Facilitators*. This checklist can not only inform facilitators of fidelity expectations in planning and implementing a parenting education series but can also be used to monitor consistency in implementation across sites and facilitators. The checklist along with a guide can be found at (www.orparenting.org) under the *Grantee Resources* tab.

For more information regarding OPEC's guidelines for fidelity in curriculum implementation contact:

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