The “Parent Connectors” Program
An empirical investigation of a parent support program

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MARCH 2, 2009

This study was supported, in part, by the U.S. Department of Education, Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP) under grant number H324C040040.

Changing Roles of Families
• Cause
• Patient
↓
• Credible Informant
• Equal Decision-Making Partner
• Evaluator/Research Partner
• Policy Maker

Are you ready to embrace family values yet?

Major Variables
• Strain and Burden Reduction
• Lack of Engagement
• Attitudes & Hope
• Support

Family Support and Education Project
Parent Connections
What is the Parent Connector Program?

A peer to peer support program for parents of children with emotional disturbances (ED).

Trained family members serve as Parent Connectors to deliver family support through weekly telephone contact.

Implementation

• Parents of children who have ED were provided a 16 hour training program on how to be a Parent Connector.
• Parent Connectors were provided with weekly group supervision by a psychologist to discuss the contact with each parent.
• Parent Connectors provided weekly phone calls and had an opportunity to meet their families face-to-face at three dinners held at the school.

Implementation and Fidelity to Intervention

Components of Intervention

Resources & Education
Advocacy

Family Contact Log

| Family Contact Log | 12 |
Who were the participants in the study?

Parents of and students served in special education ED settings in a school district in a large metropolitan area.

Characteristics of Study Sample

**Family**

- People in home (n=115)
  - Avg. # of persons in home: 4.5
  - Avg. # of children in home: 2.8
- Poverty level (n=112)
  - At or below poverty level: 44%
  - Average income: $25,520

**Student** (n=115)

- Gender: Male 76%
- Age:
  - Mean Age: 14.6 yrs.
  - Age Range: 10 to 19 yrs.
- Ethnicity:
  - Black: 55%
  - White: 24%
  - Hispanic: 10%
  - Bi-racial: 8%

69% of sample in clinical range on emotional functioning (SDQ)

85% of sample in clinical range on level of impairment (BIS)

Students have a long history of special education placement (7.5 yrs.)

**Research Design**

- Nine month pre-post design
- Parent-Child dyads randomly assigned to two conditions

**Comparison Group**

- Teachers receive specialized training in increasing parent involvement

**Connector Group**

- Teacher Training Plus
- Parents receive weekly telephone calls from Parent Connector
Recruitment and Attrition

**Time 1**
- 161 parents approached for study
  - 20 parents refused
  - 18 staff unable to contact
  - 8 did not return consent form
- 115 parents enrolled

**Time 2**
- N=60 Connector Group
  - 11 Full Interviews
  - 2 Partial* Interviews
- N=55 Comparison Group
  - 11 Full Interviews
  - 2 Partial* Interviews

*Partial Interviews contain only status as incarcerated

Support Delivered

Over the nine month period for the 60 parents in the Parent Connector group:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Construct</th>
<th>Instrument</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Never Engaged (n = 11)</td>
<td>Early Terminators (n = 7)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of attempts before taking with parent</td>
<td>Average (SD)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average (SD)</td>
<td>Range</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Never Engaged (n = 11)</td>
<td>Early Terminators (n = 7)</td>
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<td>Average (SD)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average (SD)</td>
<td>Range</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>34 (20)</td>
<td>0 - 40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>162 (14)</td>
<td>63 - 363</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>265 (144)</td>
<td>70 - 876</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Comparison of the Three Groups

- No significant difference in:
  - Student’s emotional and behavioral functioning and impairment
  - Parental services self-efficacy, stress, or empowerment

- Significant differences in student age
  - Students in the Never Engaged group were significantly older than students in the other two groups (16 years vs. 14 yrs)

Goal 1 Reduce Stress, Increase Empowerment and Efficacy

**Construct (Parent Respondent)**
- Efficacy
- Parental Stress
- Parental Empowerment

**Instrument**
- Vanderbilt Mental Health Services Efficacy Questionnaire
- Caregiver Strain Questionnaire
- The Ohio Scale - Hopefulness Subscale
- Support Functions Scale
- Family Empowerment Scale

Goal 2 Increase Use of Mental Health Services

**Construct (Respondent)**
- Student Receipt of Mental Health Services (Parent & School Staff)

**Instrument**
- Service Assessment for Children & Adolescents (SACA)
- Counselor Report

Goal 3 Improve Student Outcomes

**Construct (Respondent)**
- Improve emotional and behavioral functioning of students (Parent Report)
- Decrease level of impairment (Parent Report)
- School Attendance (School staff)
- Academic Achievement (Student)

**Instrument**
- Student Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ)
- Brief Impairment Scale (BIS)
- Attendance Report
- Wide Range Achievement Test 3 Reading/Writing (WRAT 3)
Results

Outcome - Goal 1
Improve Caregiver functioning
Of all five measures of family functioning targeted:
– Reduce Caregiver Strain
– Increase Empowerment
– Increase Support Network
– Increase MH services Efficacy
– Encourage Hopefulness

Only MH Services Efficacy statistically changed over time with the caregivers in the Parent Connectors group significantly improved over the caregivers in the comparison group.

Outcome - Goal 1
Increase MH Services Efficacy
Significant change in mental health services efficacy

Outcome - Goal 2
Increase MH Service Use by Youth
Research staff had school-based mental health counselors record the number of minutes of mental health services all youth received over the entire school year or about 9 months.

Outcome 2
Increase Use of Mental Health Services

Outcome - Goal 3:
Improve youth functioning
4 areas:
– Improve Emotional functioning (SDQ)
– Improve level of impairment (BIS)
– Improve student attendance
– Improve academic functioning (as reflected on standardized reading and math tests).

Two areas: (1) reading levels and (2) school stability.
**Outcome – Goal 3**

**Improve Student Outcomes**

Significant change in Reading over time (Mean standard WRAT score)

![Graph showing improvement in Reading scores over time for Parent Connector and Comparison groups.](image)

- Parent Connector Group: (n=38)
- Comparison Group: (n=40)

\[ f \text{ (interaction term)} = 4.023, p = .048 \]

*Wide Range Achievement Test-III (WRAT-III)*

Reading Standard Score (Wilkinson, 1993)

Higher scores indicate greater achievement.

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**Overall Results**

Found positive changes for the PC group

- Positive change in Caregiver level of MH services Efficacy
- Youth used more MH services
- Youth improved academic achievement and school stability

Wanted more! Was it a problem with the theory or with instruments or both?

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**Goal 1**

**Reduce Stress, Increase Empowerment and Efficacy**

Average levels of Caregiver Strain at the beginning of study were not highly elevated

![Graph showing average levels of Caregiver Strain.](image)

- Parent Connector group: 7.11 (n=42)
- Comparison group: 7.82 (n=47)

Caregiver Strain Questionnaire (CSQ) (Branfiet, Heflinger, Bickman, 1997)

21 questions – global score ranges from 3 to 15 with higher scores indicating greater strain.

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**Outcome – Goal 1**

**Reduce Caregiver Strain**

Significant change over time for those who were highly strained (scored 9.5 or higher – 50%)

![Graph showing change in Caregiver Strain over time for Parent Connector and Comparison groups.](image)

- Parent Connector Group: (n=12)
- Comparison Group: (n=14)

\[ f \text{ (interaction term)} = 4.50, p = .044 \]
Theoretical Framework

Components of Intervention

Theory of Change

More Information

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This study was funded in part by the Office of Special Education Programs grant: H324040040