

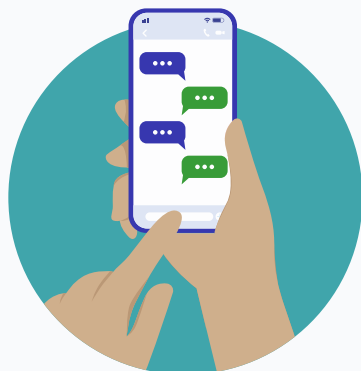
OPA EVALUATION TA

Engaging Parents in Teen Pregnancy Prevention Programs (TPP) to Support Positive Outcomes for Youth: Lessons Learned from TPP19 grantees

Parent involvement in teen pregnancy prevention (TPP) programming has been shown to support behaviors that lead to positive sexual health outcomes for youth (Maley and Powers 2014). Because of these benefits, TPP programs often strive to engage parents through education, discussion, and skill-building opportunities. Grantees in the TPP19 cohort engaged parents in a variety of ways, such as offering informational tips to help parents have conversations with their children and providing ongoing parent workshops with structured lessons (Exhibit 1).

As part of the TPP19 grants, grantees implemented evidence-based TPP curricula, with the goal of learning about implementation in their local contexts. This work included participation in a cross-site evaluation, during which grantee staff reflected on lessons learned (see “Overview of study” at the end of the brief). Tips provided in this brief were generated from interviews with leaders and frontline staff.

Exhibit 1. Grantees had various approaches and goals in engaging parents



Because TPP19 grantees had different goals, the supports they provided parents varied greatly. Engagement ranged from providing pamphlets for how to talk to kids about sex to providing parent education through reoccurring classes.

Asynchronous communication. These efforts included texts, apps, and printed materials. One grantee, for example, developed brochures about talking to teens to support parents of youth in its program. Another grantee provided tips and talking points via an app. A key goal was to support fact-based conversations between parents and youth.

Orientations or one-time parent nights. These opportunities introduced parents to the programming or curriculum and to class facilitators. One grantee noted, “We think that that was a huge part of the success of the class.... They weren’t sitting there like, ‘Oh, you’re doing that, let me look in there, and see what you’re doing’.... We’re going to tell you what it is.”

Series of parent workshops. These opportunities educated parents and supported them in having conversations with their children about sexual health. Some grantees aligned content with their youth curriculum to supplement lessons. Others surveyed parents to determine topics of interest that aligned with the goals of the program, such as talking to kids about contraception.

Why engage parents in TPP programming?

Grantees noted a variety of reasons for engaging parents in youth programs. The two most common were as follows:



To get parents on board as partners in supporting youth in the program. Several grantees provided parent orientations or workshops to enable parents to get to know

the program and inform them about the content of the curriculum to get ahead of any challenges. A few grantees, for instance, held parent nights or orientations as an opportunity for facilitators to introduce themselves to parents. During these events, staff reviewed key parts of the curriculum to ensure parents were aware of what staff would be teaching their children. One grantee emphasized that this step was critical to assuage parents' concerns or fears, and to give them the opportunity to flag topics they were not comfortable with.



To improve parents' knowledge about sexual health and support their conversations with youth. A primary reason that

grantees provided education to parents was to help them have conversations with their children about sexual health and relationships. This included ensuring parents knew the facts so they could have an informed conversation and ensuring they knew how to broach a potentially uncomfortable discussion. Teams noted that youth were with them for a short amount of time and would need a trusted adult with whom they could discuss sexual health concerns and questions for the long term. One grantee shared, "Parents are the ultimate authority on these subjects or, at least, we want to support them in being that."

What makes parent engagement difficult?

Grantees saw the benefit of engaging parents, but few reported that it was easy to do so. Many of the challenges they shared align with common challenges identified in the literature about engaging parents in programs for youth pregnancy prevention. These included changing work schedules, child care and transportation limitations, and conflicting family responsibilities (Flores et al. 2005). Several grantees noted the difficulty of finding a time that would accommodate parents' varied schedules: "We've been trying to play around with the times that we would have the parent events. Like, is it better to have them at

5:30? Is it better to have them at 7? But as soon as they get off work, are they really trying to be on a webinar?" Grantees stressed the importance of asking parents rather than assuming a universal time or structure would work across groups.

Beyond conflicts and scheduling challenges, grantees in the TPP19 cohort faced challenges stemming from the COVID-19 pandemic, including technology access barriers and Zoom fatigue.

In some cases, challenges were related not to the families but to limitations of busy programs. For instance, one program director shared that when striving to meet the grant's requirements for enrolling youth and promoting consistent attendance, supplementary parent engagement activities could sometimes "get lost in the shuffle."

What grantees learned about engaging parents

Though a challenging task, many grantees achieved success with parent outreach. This section describes some of their tips for success.

Tips and best practices for recruiting parents

One of the biggest challenges to offering parent programming—whether one time or reoccurring—was simply getting parents to respond and attend. Below are a few tips for parent recruitment.



Offer incentives or motivational perks. Several grantees mentioned that incentives or other motivational tactics enticed parents to events.

Common strategies included raffles, gift cards, or food. One grantee noted perks that worked for youth—such as a \$10 gift card—might be less motivating for parents, which prompted the team to turn to raffles of bigger-ticket items, such as an iPad. Incentives were not always monetary, however; another grantee fostered a competition between area schools to see which group could have the highest attendance at its parent event.



Build parent outreach into existing events or groups. Several grantees integrated programming into existing partner events, rather than creating separate events for parents. One grantee, for instance, received feedback on a survey that parents did not want to come to the school twice for multiple events: "I would say with any of our partners,

school or not school, [the key] is piggybacking parent events with family events that they're already having, for the reasons of not having parents have to come to the same place twice when we can just work together and it's a one-shot deal."



Employ varied and flexible outreach techniques. Grantees used emails, texts, social media, and phone calls to connect with

parents. One grantee pointed out that preferred methods for some parents didn't always match what other parents preferred: "Before you can engage with people, you have to know how they best respond to you. So really figuring out what worked best at every clubhouse. Do parents respond to texts? Do they respond to flyers? Are they more on Facebook? Do they email? You've got know what works for each location."



Offer flexible scheduling. One grantee that offered a series of parent sessions provided the sessions in two groups to allow morning and afternoon options. Parents could attend

either session from week to week. Another grantee offered a series of four workshops but ensured the topics were self-contained; this way, parents could attend one or all four sessions and still find value in attending. Yet another grantee offered virtual parent webinars live and recorded them so parents could watch later.



Partner with trusted contacts. Many grantees partnered with parent councils, parent liaisons, or teachers to help promote their

programs, leveraging credibility from people who had existing relationships with parents.



Provide programming virtually to enhance accessibility. Virtual programming was an unexpected perk of the COVID-19 pandemic

for many grantees striving to recruit and retain parents in workshops or events: "Sometimes, accessing parents is very difficult, and we found the parents loved engaging remotely." Remote engagement helped resolve transportation or child care conflicts that often presented challenges to in-person programming. However, other grantees noted that access issues related to virtual programming could be a barrier to participation. As a result, practitioners might benefit from surveying parents to understand their ability to access virtual offerings.

Exhibit 2. Detailing a practice: Ensuring parents were prepared to support conversations about sexual health

Project Vida, a TPP19 grantee, engaged parents in a series of four lessons focused on wellness, puberty, family planning and contraception, and mental health. The team aligned content with the curriculum it provided to youth to ensure parents could support conversations with their children about topics covered in the youth class.

The program supported parent attendance at sessions by offering morning and afternoon sessions and allowing parents to attend either. Groups were also offered in English and Spanish to ensure the information was broadly accessible to the community the program served. Lastly, the team shared that transitioning to virtual delivery because of the COVID-19 pandemic appeared to promote parent attendance, as it enabled parents to fit the program in between other responsibilities.

The team had success encouraging consistent participation, an outcome it attributed to incentives (for example, gift card raffles) and parents' desire to learn about the topics covered: "A lot of them never had these conversations with their parents; they just didn't know about the changes with puberty or mental health.... This provided them with education that they were able to provide to their whole family, not just the students."

Opportunities to support engagement of parents

Grantees also shared tips for ensuring programming and events were engaging. Appealing events can spark parents' interest in the offerings, and support their continued participation in reoccurring classes.



Understand what parents want and shape programming to meet their interests.

Several grantees spoke about the value of gathering parent input about topics of interest, rather than having the team generate a list of topics. This didn't mean grantees had to survey every parent who might participate, as one grantee noted that parents who were surveyed didn't necessarily have to be the same parents who attended, assuming they represented a similar demographic. "We were asking them, 'What would you attend? How would you attend? What would make you attend? What subjects are you interested in to actually learn about?'"



Break the ice early on. Many grantees' parent sessions involved discussions about topics parents weren't used to talking about. To encourage discussion, staff invested time up front building a safe space, developing relationships, and getting parents comfortable. This involved starting with lighter conversations, such as getting parents to reflect on their teen years: "Our approach was, remember when you were this age? Remember what you were doing? Remember what you were thinking? And, actually, nudging them to tell their stories.... It was so adorable to see this group laugh." Another director shared that her program started with a broader question—"Tell us the ways in which has COVID-19 influenced your relationship with your teen"—before getting to discussions about sexual health and any questions parents might have.



Support parents in talking with their teens. Grantees who asked youth and parents to attend together promoted engagement by getting them to talk to each other:

"It's an opportunity for parents and for students or children to just really sit and get a better understanding of why my mom says this, why my dad says this, and then for parents to understand a little bit more about why their child reacts a certain way." At the same time, other grantees felt it was important to separate youth and parents to encourage them to talk openly. Programs might want to experiment with different structures to determine what works best.

Though challenging work, several of the TPP19 grantees had successes in engaging parents in programming. One grantee, for instance, had more than 1,000 people attend at least one of its six webinars directed at parents. The tips shared in this brief are a starting place to build toward success. One of the strongest messages emerging from interviews with grantees is that a one-size-fits-all approach rarely works. Instead, spending time up front gathering feedback from parents in each community is key to strong engagement.

Exhibit 3. Detailing a practice: Engaging parents as partners to support programming

Keiki O Ka 'Aina (KOKA), a TPP19 grantee in Hawaii, put a high priority on starting its youth cohorts with a parent and caregiver orientation. The team invited parents to join the orientation, and staff personally called each parent to remind them about the orientation and offer them an opportunity to ask questions.

Because many parents and caregivers were wary of the types of conversations the program might be having with their children, staff began by breaking the ice and helping parents reflect on their experiences when they were young: "We get them comfortable. We get them laughing. We get them to remember, this isn't scary."

The concept of a trusted adult was already part of the Love Notes curriculum that KOKA was implementing, so KOKA pulled material from the lessons and added activities and discussion that helped facilitators build trust with caregivers. KOKA's goal was to introduce content and logistics and ensure caregivers understood their role as trusted adults and saw themselves as partners in supporting the goals of the program. To support caregivers in taking on this role, KOKA provided them with opening questions and talking points to encourage conversations with their children about topics the team would be covering throughout the program. A staff member shared, "They always have access to us, even post-class, if they have questions, comments, or concerns. We're always open and available."

Additional resources

For more information about parent engagement, please see the following resources:

McCallum, D., and K. Adamek. "Strategies for Engaging Parents and Caregivers Tip Sheet." Washington, DC: Office of Population Affairs, Office of the Assistant Secretary for Health, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2020. Available at https://rhntc.org/sites/default/files/resources/opa_parent_engagement_2020-07.pdf.

Office of Population Affairs. "Tips and Best Practices for Family Engagement." Washington, DC: Office of Population Affairs, Office of the Assistant Secretary for Health, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2019. Available at https://rhntc.org/sites/default/files/resources/opa_Tips_and_Best_Pr_2019_11_4.pdf.

Office of Population Affairs. "Engaging Parents and Caregivers in Programs for Healthy Teen Relationships and Sexual Health." Washington, DC: Office of Population Affairs, Office of the Assistant Secretary for Health, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2020. Available at https://rhntc.org/sites/default/files/resources/opa_engaging_parents_6-12-20.pdf.

Reproductive Health National Training Center. "Talking with Teens About Sex: Resources for Caregivers." January 2022. Available at <https://rhntc.org/resources/talking-teens-about-sex-resources-caregivers>.

References

Flores, J.E., S. Montgomery, and J.W. Lee. "Organization and Staffing Barriers to Parent Involvement in Teen Pregnancy Prevention Programs: Challenges for Community Partnerships." *Journal of Adolescent Health*, vol. 37, 2005, pp. 108–114.

Maley, M., and J. Powers. "Systematic Translational Review: Parent Education for Teen Pregnancy Prevention." Ithaca, NY: Cornell University, Bronfenbrenner Center for Translational Research, 2014.

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Overview of study

The Office of Population Affairs (OPA) in the Office of the Assistant Secretary for Health (OASH) at the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services awards annual grants to support teen pregnancy prevention (TPP). In 2018, OPA awarded 14 organizations two-year Teen Pregnancy Prevention (TPP) Phase 1 Tier 2 grants to refine, implement, and formatively evaluate their innovative program models to prepare for a potential summative evaluation. In 2019, OPA awarded another 29 organizations two-year TPP Phase 1 Tier 1 grants to select, refine, and implement evidence-based programs (EBPs). Additionally, the 2019 TPP Tier 1 grantees were expected to use continuous quality improvement processes and conduct process evaluations to support the refinement of the EBP for their community while establishing evidence for broader implementation, and possible OPA support for a summative evaluation.

OPA awarded Mathematica a contract to design and conduct an external cross-site implementation study. The cross-site implementation study had two goals: (1) to document the process that grantees followed to get their programs and staff ready to implement the program and (2) to identify lessons to help future grantees ensure their programs are ready and appropriate to implement in their communities.



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