

Background

The U.S. Advisory Board on Child Abuse and Neglect states that home visiting and center-based programs with a parental focus can help prevent child abuse and neglect by focusing on reducing known risk factors (e.g. lack of positive parenting skills, poverty, unemployment, low levels of education, and community violence). The Task Force on Community Preventive Services, an independent body of public health and prevention experts appointed by the Director of the Center for Disease Control and Prevention, recommends early childhood visitation as an effective method of preventing child abuse and neglect. To date, attempts to prevent child abuse have strongly emphasized the importance of parenting skills' intervention to address the deficits in child management skills often found in abusive parents. These deficits include the use of coercive and punitive parenting strategies that intensify and perpetuate child behavior problems and thereby increase the likelihood of child maltreatment in the family. Building positive parent-child interaction is at the core of child abuse and neglect prevention efforts.

ParentChild+

ParentChild+, a national, research-based early childhood home visiting program, has demonstrated that it makes a significant difference in the lives of young children and their families, promoting positive parenting skills and building positive parent-child verbal interaction to enhance children's conceptual and social-emotional development. The Program provides intensive home visiting to families with children between the ages of two and hours, challenged by poverty, low levels of education, language and literacy barriers and other obstacles to healthy child development and educational success. In twice-weekly home visits, a training Home Visitor models, for the parent and child, play, verbal interaction, and reading activities that create a language-rich home environment and promote "positive parenting" skills. Home Visitors show parents how, through play and verbal interaction, they can enhance their children's conceptual and social-emotional development.

The Program's curriculum, activities, and outcomes introduce or increase protective factors known to prevent child abuse and neglect. These are:

- Knowledge of parenting and child development.
- Social connections.
- Parent resilience.
- Concrete support in times of need.
- Social and emotional competence of children.

Relevant Studies on ParentChild+

- In a randomized controlled trial and five quasi-experimental studies conducted between 1967 and 1984, ParentChild+ had significant ongoing positive effects on participating parents' interaction with their children, in contrast to control group families that were examined before, immediately after, and two years

after completion of the Program. Program parents' verbal interaction with their children showed a lasting superiority in quality and quantity over that of the control group, and this parent-child interaction correlated with children's first grade cognitive and social emotional skills. These early studies laid the foundation for and guide our current quality assurance data on both parent-child interaction and the child's development, which is collected by sites using our validated assessments (PACT and CBT).¹

- An independent evaluation of ParentChild+ replications in two Pennsylvania counties indicates that positive parenting behaviors increased dramatically as a result of program participation. Half of the children identified as "at risk" in their home environments at the start were found to be no longer at risk at the completion of the Program. The number of positive interactions between parent and child increased significantly during program participation, including instances of praise and/or encouragement observed; of parents showing warmth toward the child; and of parents giving their child directions and encouraging the child to follow them.²
- Multiple studies show that families participating in ParentChild+ talk more and have more positive interactions with their children.³
- Research on the Program has consistently demonstrated that parents who participate in the Program exhibit more and consistent positive interaction and affect toward their children.⁴

¹ Joint Dissemination Review Panel of U.S. Department of Education. (1978). Unanimous Approval of Research Findings, 1967-1978, Mother-Child Home Program of Verbal Interaction Project. Freeport, NY: Verbal Interaction Project.

² Raftery, M. & Knickelbein, B. (2005). Cohort One Final Report: Assessment Summary of the Parent Child Home Program. An evaluation of the Armstrong Indiana County Intermediate Unit PCHP program, Center for Educational and Program Evaluation located at Indiana University of Pennsylvania.

³ Madden, J., O'Hara, J. M., & Levenstein, P. (1984). Home again. *Child Development*, 55, 636-647.

⁴ See annotated bibliography available at www.parentchildplus.org