



## THEME 5

# Parental Confidence

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### Related survey items

- Since I began coming to this program/centre, I feel more confident as a parent or caregiver. (Parenting Survey #4)

### Related family support principle

- Family support programs operate from an ecological perspective that recognizes the interdependent nature of families' lives
- Family support programs affirm parenting to be a life-long learning process.

### Importance of parental confidence

In its national survey of over 1600 Canadian mothers and fathers, Invest in Kids Foundation discovered that confidence in their knowledge of child development and in their parenting skills was quite low (Oldershaw, 2002). According to the same survey, the more knowledgeable parents were about child development and the more confident they were in the parenting role, the more likely they were to have positive, effective and less punitive interactions with their young children.

### Increasing parental confidence at family resource programs

Family support workers aim to increase parental independence and confidence by creating opportunities for families to do for themselves, to learn, to access needed resources and to connect with others in their community (Cameron & Vanderwoerd, 1997; Kalafat, 2004). Unless families are encouraged to use and develop their own resources, the involvement of too many helping professionals in a family's life for too long can lead to increased dependency and decreased family confidence (Cameron & Vanderwoerd, 1997). Ideally, a family is neither entirely independent nor dependent, but rather experiences the positive interdependence found in a social network of formal and informal supports.

Parents whose self-confidence is low tend to feel overwhelmed when faced with multiple stressors. They may give up trying to take positive actions on their own behalf (McCurdy & Jones, 2000). By helping parents increase their self-confidence, their sense of self-efficacy and their feelings of hopefulness, workers in family resource programs make it easier for families to take steps to improve their situation (Kalafat, 2004; McCurdy & Jones, 2000). Rather than focussing on families' problems, workers focus on their strengths and thus help families to believe in themselves (MacAulay, 2002). When workers emphasize the

positive, they build a stronger connection with parents (McCurdy & Jones, 2000).

Whether the process is formal or informal, conducting family assessments and designing service plans provides workers with opportunities to focus on family strengths, capabilities and competencies. For instance, the family's readiness to change and the parents' ability to invest in learning parenting skills are both assets (Lang & Krongard, 1999). In addition, it is easier to engage family members if workers pay close attention to the challenges the family itself identifies, its perspectives on possible solutions and its hopes and timelines (Lang & Krongard, 1999). In this way, the family learns to assess its own situation and to identify its strengths and solutions (Lang & Krongard, 1999).

Staff members assist the family to make decisions by showing how to access information necessary to make healthy choices and by supporting continuing efforts. When family members experience success they are empowered to make other choices in their lives (Silver et al., 2005). They learn strategies to prevent crises and to handle stresses and therefore feel more confident and prepared. For example, teaching parents to relax can be an effective strategy to increase parental confidence and empathy (Mills, 1995).

Increased self-mastery, self-esteem and self-sufficiency can result from participation in family support programs (Comer & Fraser, 1998; Parker, Piorkowski, & Peay, 1987). Also, well-informed families can manage their home more confidently and competently. Participants in family resource programs discover their talents, skills and other gifts while helping to facilitate their children's cognitive, social and behavioural development (Comer & Fraser, 1998). By encouraging mutual assistance and peer support, parent education programs can provide parents with more appropriate discipline strategies. At the same time, hearing other parents' stories helps parents feel less alone with their frustrations (Onyskiw, Harrison, Spady, & McConnan, 1999). Parents are encouraged to continually improve

when they see that parenting is a life-long learning process.

As their level of skills and knowledge goes up, parents feel more able to influence and help their children. They are able to collaborate more in the services provided to their children (Reich et al., 2004). Participation in family resource programs promotes a sense of pride for both parents and children (Silver et al., 2005).

### **Citizen engagement**

Being part of a community effort to solve community problems can also increase parents' sense of empowerment (Lang & Krongard, 1999; Williams, 2002). By volunteering in governance, planning and fundraising, participants develop their confidence, build their skills and improve their employment possibilities (Silver et al., 2005). Workers can make a point of crediting families with the successful outcomes of the centre and other community initiatives to which they contribute. An additional benefit of emphasizing parental empowerment and confidence is that parents may be more likely to continue to use programs if they are hopeful and feel that they are becoming more competent (Lang & Krongard, 1999).

In sum, family resource programs have the potential to increase the quality of the home environment by their effect on parental confidence (Comer & Fraser, 1998; Trivette & Dunst, 2005). When programs provide a variety of services and do so in a family-centred way, parents' confidence and competence is enhanced (Dunst & Trivette, 2001). When parents' confidence is enhanced, they are more likely to interact with their children in ways that promote the children's social and emotional development (Trivette & Dunst, 2005).

## Annotated References

Oldershaw, L. (2002). *A National Survey of Parents of Young Children*. Toronto: Invest in Kids Foundation. Retrieved June 28, 2006 from [http://professionals.investinkids.ca/Professionals/Pages/Common/ContentPage.aspx?name=pro\\_national\\_survey\\_parents](http://professionals.investinkids.ca/Professionals/Pages/Common/ContentPage.aspx?name=pro_national_survey_parents)

This report on the findings from a national survey of 1,643 Canadian mothers and fathers of young children shows that while parents value and enjoy their role, their parenting behaviour leaves room for improvement (62% reported regular use of punitive/angry behaviour when their children misbehave and 34% reported being ineffective in their child management). Parents' knowledge about child development, their confidence in their knowledge and their confidence in their parenting skills are quite low. The survey also found that good parenting is related to parents' knowledge and confidence.

Parker, F. L., Piorkowski, C. S. & Peay, I. (1987). Head Start as a social support for mothers: The psychological benefits of involvement. *American Journal of Orthopsychiatry*, 57 (2), 220-233.

This research article discusses the effect of the US Head Start program on mothers' psychological well-being and confidence. Eighty-two mothers who used the health care, financial planning workshops, psychological counseling sessions and peer group support offered through Head Start had higher feelings of mastery. Along with increased confidence, mothers also experienced decreased psychological symptoms and increased satisfaction with their current quality of life, after using the family support services.

Silver, S., Berman, R., & Wilson, S. (2005). *What participants value: Practices and outcomes at family resource programs*. An MAFRP - Ryerson University Project. Retrieved January 27, 2006 from <http://www.ryerson.ca/voices/pdf/participantsvalue.pdf>

The Voices project was a large-scale qualitative research study designed to uncover what participants most value about family resource programs. Four main themes emerged from interviews and focus groups conducted across Canada as regards factors that contribute to the success of family resource programs. The themes were the importance of engaging families, empowering participants, building social support and social capital, and building community. These themes were then used to develop a set of indicators for evaluating family support organizations.

Trivette C. & Dunst C. (2005). Community-based parent support programs. In: Tremblay, R., Barr, R., Peters, R., eds. *Encyclopedia on Early Childhood Development* [online]. Montreal, Quebec: Centre of Excellence for Early Childhood Development, 1-8. Retrieved February 14, 2006 from <http://www.excellence-earlychildhood.ca/documents/Trivette-DunstANGxp.pdf>

Trivette and Dunst provide a brief review of research literature regarding the development of parenting skills in community programs for parents and families. They indicate that family resource programs can increase caregivers' and

parents' sense of confidence and competence through the application of family-centred approaches.

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This literature summary is one of ten that have been prepared in conjunction with the FRP Canada e-Valuation project. Each literature summary addresses a theme or indicator from the Participant Survey or Staff and Volunteer Survey.

**Principal Researcher**

Dr. Peter Gabor

**Researcher**

Ellen Perrault

**Writer/editor**

Betsy Mann

**Project Coordinator**

Janice MacAulay

**Layout**

Create Method