



Florida HIP

Research Brief #4

Training & Technical Assistance Center for
Florida's Home Instruction for Parents of Preschool Youngsters

Building Relationships and Trust with HIP Families

Introduction

HIPPY (Home Instruction for Parents of Preschool Youngsters, formerly the Home Instruction Program for Preschool Youngsters) is a home-based, early intervention program that helps parents teach skills important to school readiness and success to their three, four, and five-year-old children. This free service is delivered by HIPPY paraprofessionals who live in targeted communities. Through HIPPY's systematic program of role playing, curriculum activities and group meetings, parents learn to engage in learning activities with their children and to view themselves as active agents in their children's education and schooling. HIPPY has a number of goals for the parents involved in the program, including:

- Empowering parents to view themselves as primary educators of their children;
- Teaching parents and children the joy of learning;
- Stimulating educational interaction between parents and their children;
- Fostering parental involvement in school and community life; and
- Breaking through the social isolation of parents.

To achieve these goals, paraprofessionals must be able to convince parents of the value of HIPPY and *inspire* and motivate parents to complete the HIPPY curriculum activities with their children. The success of HIPPY, therefore, depends heavily on the relationship paraprofessionals develop with families they serve and the ability of paraprofessionals to engage families.

Research Questions

- How do paraprofessionals build relationships and trust with the families they serve?
- How does the relationship between the paraprofessional and family affect the delivery of HIPPY?

Purpose

The purpose of this brief is to describe how paraprofessionals build trusting relationships with their HIPPY families, and the importance of these relationships to the HIPPY model. The Florida HIPPY T& TA Center and the University of South Florida will use the information in this research brief as a resource for developing further in-depth studies of the role of relationships in the HIPPY model. The findings may also be used by HIPPY sites to inform processes for recruitment, training and supervision of home visitors.

Method

This research brief is based upon data extracted from the Six Sites Study including information from paraprofessional surveys and paraprofessional focus groups. The Six Sites Study surveyed and interviewed paraprofessionals from six HIPPY programs in Florida as part of an evaluation effort to investigate how HIPPY works in Florida and to provide feedback for quality improvement in programs. Thirty paraprofessionals completed surveys and participated in 120-minute focus groups. Information provided by paraprofessionals was reviewed and reported using descriptive and qualitative analysis methods.

Findings

How do paraprofessionals build relationships and trust with the families they serve?

In general, the paraprofessionals participating in this study reported having very positive relationships with most of their HIPPY families. Nearly 97% of paraprofessionals felt that their HIPPY parents think they do a good job. All of the paraprofessionals surveyed agreed that they have good relationships with the families they serve and are trusted by them, though 20% of paraprofessionals indicated that some HIPPY families still feel uncomfortable with home visits.

Paraprofessionals are very committed to the families they serve and have developed strategies for creating trusting relationships with HIPPY families. According to the paraprofessionals surveyed, professional behavior is a critical factor in developing good relationships with parents. Paraprofessionals also viewed personal relationships with their families and open communication as contributing to the development of trust.

- Professional behavior was emphasized by 56% of paraprofessionals as a way to build trust with HIPPY families. Their suggestions included being punctual for appointments, keeping appointments and calling to reschedule when necessary, respecting the privacy and confidentiality of families, responding to phone calls or pages promptly, and coming to appointments prepared.
- Most paraprofessionals felt that developing a personal relationship with their families was essential to building trust. Twenty-four of the paraprofessionals participating in this study gave examples of ways they have developed personal relationships with their HIPPY families. Talking, specifically about things other than HIPPY, and listening were mentioned most frequently.
- Other activities cited as building personal relationships with families included: taking a personal interest in family activities, helping with children, praying with families, and interacting with families as a friend, not just as a HIPPY provider.

- The similarities paraprofessionals share with their families were also seen as important. One noted, “I’m one of them, they can talk to me.” Just taking the time to talk and listen with families was the most effective approach to developing trust, according to paraprofessionals.
- Though it has been noted that many paraprofessionals assist families in meeting daily needs such as child-care and transportation, these activities were considered less important in establishing trust with families. Being supportive of families’ achievements, providing encouragement, and connecting parents with resources in the community were considered more important than providing tangible services.
- Paraprofessionals also indicated that they build trust by encouraging their HIPPY parents and developing their self-esteem. One paraprofessional noted that parents trust her because they see her working and they recognize the change that HIPPY has made in her life.

How does the relationship between the paraprofessional and family affect the delivery of HIPPY?

- A trusting, professional relationship with parents helps paraprofessionals establish themselves as role models for parents.
- A good relationship between paraprofessionals and parents may also empower parents, helping them overcome feelings of insecurity about their ability to teach their children.
- A strong relationship with their paraprofessional may engage parents more fully in the HIPPY model, inspiring them to teach their children using the HIPPY curriculum as well as be more involved with other aspects of their children’s lives.
- Paraprofessionals with good relationships with the families they serve may also impact parents’ behavior beyond HIPPY, encouraging them in other aspects of their lives, such as education and employment goals.

Ways Paraprofessionals Build Trust with HIPPY Families

Personalizing Relationships and Developing Communication	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Talk to parents and families • Listen to parents • Smile, be friendly • Pray with parents • Take a personal interest in their family 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Be there as a friend • Hold conversations about topics other than HIPPY • Take the time to get to know each other • Cry and laugh together
Maintaining Professionalism	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Be punctual • Keep appointments • Be responsible and keep promises • Respect the families' privacy and confidentiality • Respond to phone calls and pages 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reschedule appointments only when necessary • Be prepared with the right material • Keep parents informed about end of the year activities and notify them of upcoming events
Fulfilling Job Roles & Responsibilities	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Help families find the resources they need • Let them know about other resources they could use 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Advocate for families
Encouraging and Motivating Parents	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Let them know it's okay if they have to reschedule • Help build their self-esteem • Remind parents how important they are as their child's first teacher • Let them know HIPPY is different for each child 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Encourage them to help themselves • Remind them that HIPPY will help their children and themselves • Help them spend more time with kids • I provide a good example when they see me working • Share "the arts of positive thinking"
Going the Extra Mile	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Be available whenever needed • Encourage them to call whenever they need me • Babysit and help with children 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Give rides • Help with personal problems

Implications for Research & Practice

HIPPY paraprofessionals report having success with developing trusting relationships and rapport with HIPPY parents. One of the strengths of HIPPY is its commitment to recruiting paraprofessionals from the families and neighborhoods served. Paraprofessionals have a unique understanding of the needs of their HIPPY families and are considered by many of their families to be a friend as well as a HIPPY provider. This relationship may be considered one of the keys to the success of HIPPY.

Implications for Research

- Clearly, the paraprofessionals in this study felt comfortable in their ability to establish relationships with the families they served. How much this is due to the personal characteristics and training of the paraprofessionals and how much is due to paraprofessionals being a part of the communities they serve could be explored by talking with paraprofessionals who come from backgrounds and communities that are different from their families.
- The findings reported here are based on information obtained from paraprofessionals. Further insights into the nature of family engagement and paraprofessional-family relationship building could be obtained by soliciting the perspectives of families and program coordinators. Focus groups with families and interviews with coordinators would give these

groups the opportunity to share their views about paraprofessional characteristics, behaviors, and activities that lead to trusting relationships.

- An investigation of the lines between paraprofessionals' professional and personal involvement with families and the effects of different types of involvement would provide valuable guidance for policy, training, and supervision. This should include obtaining information from coordinators, paraprofessionals, and parents on current practices, and more in-depth exploration of situations in which paraprofessionals have accommodated parents' needs or requests by providing transportation, lending money or other such personal involvement.

Implications for Practice

- HIPPY paraprofessionals view their interpersonal skills and their professional behavior as important in engaging families. Thus, program processes for selection, training and supervision of HIPPY paraprofessionals should emphasize both interpersonal/social skills and organizational skills/professional behaviors.
- While personalizing relationships with families may enhance engagement, it also raises issues of the blurring of lines between professional and personal roles with families, an issue faced by all programs employing staff from the communities being served.

HIPPY programs should continue to provide opportunities for paraprofessionals to explore these issues including: 1) providing information on activities that are and are not officially sanctioned; 2) raising awareness and reflecting on the consequences of specific types of activities and personal involvement with families; and 3) reflecting on their own comfort level with different levels of personal involvement.

This Brief was prepared by Kirsten Cuenca and Diane Powell from data collected by Lois-Lynn S. Deuel for the Florida HIPPY 6-Sites Study.

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About Florida HIPPY

Home Instruction for Parents of Preschool Youngsters (HIPPY) is a home based, parent involvement program designed to help parents provide educational enrichment for their three, four, and five-year-old children.

The Florida HIPPY Training and Technical Assistance (T&TA) Center, based at the University of South Florida (USF), works in collaboration with HIPPY USA's National Office in New York to provide training, technical support, and guidance to all of the HIPPY programs in the state of Florida.

The Florida HIPPY T&TA Center, in conjunction with USF, HIPPY USA, and Florida HIPPY sites, began this research initiative to evaluate the efficacy of the HIPPY model, measure and describe changes in program participants, and provide evidence-based support for HIPPY programs.

Data from selected Florida HIPPY programs have been collected and analyzed. The purpose of these research briefs is to share knowledge on topics of interest with HIPPY stakeholders. Findings from this research may be used to develop "best practices" in service delivery, for program improvement and enhancement, to describe program functioning and impact to stakeholders, and to support program sustainability.



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