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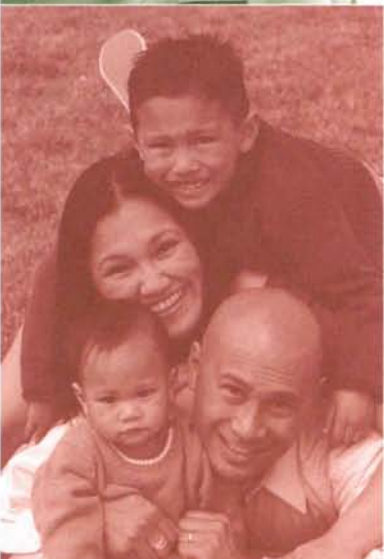


Practical Parent Education

*An evaluation of the Back to Basics series:
A summary of the pilot phase results*



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February 2010

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Acknowledgments

The following staff from Wilder Research contributed to the completion of this report:

Mark Anton
Rena Cleveland
Louann Graham
Heather Johnson
Alicia Matos
Miguel Salazar
Dan Swanson
Lue Thao

Additional contributors include the parent educators who helped coordinate and/or collect data from parents, including: Robert Garcia, Cynthia Gonzalez, Lydia Padilla, and Betty Williams.

Program background

Practical Parent Education (PPE) provides curriculum, training, and support to parent educators nationwide to facilitate their implementation of successful parenting programs. Based in Plano, Texas, PPE has developed a parenting education curriculum that consists of more than 50 modules addressing a wide range of childrearing topics. Individual modules can be selected and implemented as needed, allowing parent educators to tailor parent education classes to the needs of diverse populations within varied settings.

Prior to using the curriculum, parent educators are required to attend a comprehensive three-day training in which they learn about family systems and lifespan development theory, the benefits to children of effective parenting skills, strategies for increasing parental capacity and involvement, group facilitation skills, short term and long term goals of parent education programs, and more. Through the services provided to parent educators, Practical Parent Education is dedicated to providing parents with the support, parenting skills, and resources needed in order to raise responsible, self-confident, mentally healthy children.

Some modules or lessons have been intentionally packaged together to create a parent education series that focuses on specific parenting issues and/or targeted populations. One such series is *Back to Basics*, a six-session course that focuses on key, broad-based parenting topics and can be used in multiple settings with a wide array of caregivers, parenting children of any age. More specifically, the series addresses parenting styles and the family system, positive communication and the expression of feelings, conflict management, self-esteem of children and parents, positive discipline techniques, and stress management. The goal of the series is to provide parents with the knowledge and skills needed to establish a healthy climate in their families that nurtures the development of responsible young adults.

Overview of evaluation

The evaluation of Practical Parent Education focuses on the *Back to Basics* series of lessons and is intended to assess both process and outcome/impact aspects of the series. The process evaluation includes: a) gathering descriptive information about participating parent educators and families, b) assessing the implementation of the series and parents' participation, and c) assessing parent satisfaction with the series.

The outcome evaluation aims to assess the impact of the *Back to Basics* series on both parents and their children. Parenting skills are assessed at four points in time (pre-series, post-series, 6 months post-series, and 12 months post-series) to examine potential changes in parenting skills and the long-term maintenance of those skills. At each time point, parents are asked to self-report on specific dimensions of their parenting, including: attachment, communication, discipline practices, involvement, parenting confidence, satisfaction with the child's schooling, relational frustration, parental distress, and the parent-child relationship/interactions. Information about children's behavior and well-being is gathered from parents at these same time points to assess whether the skills and knowledge parents have gained translate into improvements in their children's behavior and interactions at home and/or school. Aspects of the parent-child relationship are also examined.

The evaluation employs a quasi-experimental design, including a nonrandomized comparison group of parents who have not participated in the *Back to Basics* series. This approach provides increased assurance that any changes in parenting or child behavior are the result of parents' participation in the *Back to Basics* series of lessons.

Pilot phase

To determine the most appropriate tools and approaches for gathering this information, a pilot phase of the evaluation was implemented between April and September, 2009. Five instructors (or teams of instructors) agreed to teach *Back to Basics* and collect information from parents prior to the start, and at the conclusion, of the six-session series. (Data collection at the 6- and 12-month follow-up time points was not conducted in the pilot phase). Three instructors ultimately participated in the pilot phase of the evaluation and provided parent and child data.

Process evaluation results

The following is a summary of the findings from the pilot phase of the process evaluation of the *Back to Basics* series offered through Practical Parent Education.

Description of instructors

All three instructors participating in the pilot had at least two years of parent education experience and had previously taught PPE lessons. For two instructors, their participation in the pilot phase was their first experience teaching the *Back to Basics* series. All of the instructors were also college graduates, one of whom had completed some post-graduate course work (Figures 1-2).

1. Parent education experience of instructors (N=3)

Type of experience	N
Experience teaching parent education (general)	
2 years	1
5 years	1
7 years	1
Experience using PPE (any lessons)	
1 year	2
5 years	1
First-time teaching Back to Basics	
Yes	2
No	1

2. Education and licensure of instructors (N=3)

	N
Highest education level completed	
College graduate (BA, BS)	2
Some post-graduate work or professional school	1
Licensure status	
No license held	3

Description of parents

Participating parents provided background information about themselves and their families prior to participating in the *Back to Basics* class. Both English- and Spanish-speaking parents were eligible to participate in the evaluation.

Parent education experience

Of the 13 parents participating in some portion of the pilot phase of the evaluation, most (85%) had previously participated in some form of parent education (Figure 3). The majority (92%) were referred to the course by a physician or nurse, a counselor or therapist, or a family member or friend. Three-quarters of the parents were also referred directly by their *Back to Basics* parent instructor (Figure 4). For those parents for whom attendance information was available, all parents (9 to 11) attended each of the six sessions in full (Figure 5).

3. Parents' previous experience with parent education (N=13)

	N	%
Previously attended a parent education class	11	85%
1 to 3 classes	3	30%
4 to 6 classes	1	10%
7 to 10 classes	3	30%
More than 10 classes	3	10%

4. Back to Basics referral source (N=10-13)

	N	%
Participation in a parenting course is mandatory	1	10%
Referred to the class		
By doctor/nurse/pediatrician	12	92%
By counselor or therapist	12	92%
By family member or friend	12	92%
By child's teacher/school administrator	8	62%
Court system or Child Protective Services	0	0%
Other ^a	10	77%

Note. Parents could indicate multiple referral sources, so totals exceed 100 percent.

^a Several parents indicated that their *Back to Basics* instructor referred them to the class.

5. Parent attendance in Back to Basics class (N=9-11)

Number who attended...	The full session	Part of the session	Did not attend the session
Session 1	11	0	0
Session 2	11	0	0
Session 3	11	0	0
Session 4	11	0	0
Session 5	11	0	0
Session 6	9	0	0

Demographic characteristics

Almost all of the participating parents (92%) were female. Most were in their thirties (69%), Hispanic/Latino (77%), and spoke Spanish as their primary language (75%). About half of the parents (46%) were married, and about one-third (31%) were either separated, divorced, or widowed (Figure 6). Three-quarters of the parents had at least a high school diploma or GED. Parents' employment status varied; about one in three were employed, one-quarter were stay-at-home parents, and the remaining parents were unemployed for various reasons (Figure 7).

6. Demographic characteristics of parents (N=12-13)

	N	%
Gender		
Female	12	92%
Male	1	8%
Age		
20 to 29 years	1	8%
30 to 39 years	9	69%
40 to 49 years	1	8%
50 or older	2	15%
Race/ethnicity		
Hispanic/Latino	10	77%
African American/Black	3	23%
Primary language in household		
Spanish	9	75%
English	2	17%
Bilingual (English/Spanish)	1	8%
Marital status		
Married	6	46%
Separated/divorced/widowed	4	31%
Single, never married	2	15%
Living with a partner	1	8%

7. Education and employment status of parents (N=12)

	N	%
Highest education level completed		
Some high school	3	25%
High school graduate or GED	5	42%
Some college	1	8%
Two-year degree or technical college	3	25%
Employment status		
Stay-at-home parent/guardian	3	23%
Employed full-time	2	15%
Employed part-time	2	15%
Unemployed	2	15%
Not working due to disability	2	15%
Not employed, taking care of family member(s)	1	8%

Household characteristics

In most of the households, there were at least two adults present (69% of households), and two or more children (66% of households). Three-quarters of the parents were renters. All households earned less than \$40,000 annually, with most (69%) reporting less than \$20,000 a year (Figure 8). Half of the respondents were single parents; the remaining parents were co-parenting with a spouse or partner (Figure 9). All parents had legal custody of all of their children (Figure 10).

8. Description of household (N=8-13)

	N	%
Number of adults living in the household		
One adult	4	31%
Two adults	6	46%
Three adults	1	8%
Four adults	2	15%
Number of children living in the household^a		
None	1	8%
One child	3	25%
Two to three children	6	50%
Four to five children	2	16%
Housing situation		
Rents a home/apartment	6	75%
Owns home	2	25%
Total annual income of household		
\$10,000 or less	6	46%
Between \$10,001 and \$20,000	3	23%
Between \$20,001 and \$40,000	4	31%

^a The age of children living in the household ranged from 1 to 16 years of age.

9. Parenting status (N=12)

	N	%
Single parent/guardian	6	50%
Co-parenting with a spouse/partner living in the household	5	42%
Co-parenting with a spouse/partner living elsewhere	1	8%

10. Custody status of focal child (N=7)

	Number who said “yes”
All children are currently in parent’s legal custody	7/7

Experiences with social support and stressful life events

Parents reported varying levels of social support.¹ Most (7 of 8) said they had someone they could talk to about problems, and someone they could spend time with doing fun activities. Six of seven parents also had someone in their lives that could give them a ride if needed. Fewer parents (4 of 7) had someone who helped with household chores, could watch their children for a few hours, or loan them money if needed (Figure 11). Few parents had experienced specific stressful life events in the year prior to their enrollment in the *Back to Basics* course (Figure 12).

11. Social support of parents (N=7-8)

Right now, do you have someone in your life who...	Number who said "yes"
You can talk to about your problems or concerns?	7/8
Will watch your children for a few hours?	4/7
Will help you with household chores?	4/7
Will loan you money if you need it?	4/7
Will give you or your children a ride if you need it?	6/7
You can spend time with doing fun things?	7/8

12. Stressful life events experienced by parents (N=7-8)

In the last 6 months, has...	Number who said "yes"
An adult in your household started a new job?	1/7
An adult in your household lost a job unexpectedly?	1/7
Someone in your household become seriously ill or injured?	1/7
Someone in your household moved in or out?	1/8
Someone in your household died?	0/7
Some in your household got married?	0/7
Someone in your household became pregnant?	0/7
Someone in your household became separated or divorced?	0/7
Someone in your household got into trouble with the law?	0/7
Someone in your household had an alcohol or drug problem?	0/7
Someone in your household was involved in a personal relationship with someone who hit them, slapped them, or pushed them around, or threatened to do so?	0/7

¹ Several parents did not complete page 2 of the questionnaire that asked about social support and stressful life events, reducing the data available for these topics

Description of children

Parents were also asked to provide some basic background information about their children. For parents of more than one child, the parent was asked to answer all evaluation questions in relation to one of their children (the “focal” child). Focal children ranged in age from 5 to 14 years (Figure 13).

13. Age of focal child (N=7)

Age	Number of parents identifying a focal child at this age
5 years	1
12 years	2
13 years	3
14 years	1

Children’s school experiences

Parents were also asked to describe their children’s current performance and attendance in school. Children’s performance in school varied from “fair” to “excellent.” Parents generally thought their children were getting along with other school children, although somewhat fewer parents thought their child was getting along well with his or her teachers. All parents said their child had missed four or fewer days of school in the past three months (Figure 14).

14. Schooling experience of focal child (N=7)

Over the last month...	Excellent	Good	Fair	Poor
How well has your child been doing in his or her schoolwork or grades?	2	3	2	0
How was has your child been getting along with other kids at school?	2	5	0	0
How well has your child been getting along with teachers at school?	2	2	3	0
Over the last 3 months...	0 days	1-4 days	5-7 days	8 or more days
How many full days of school has your child missed?	2	5	0	0

Outcome evaluation results

The following summarizes the outcome results from the pilot phase of the *Back to Basics* evaluation. Parents provided information on their perceived parenting skills, their relationship with their children, and their child's behaviors through the completion of three standardized assessments:

- 1) **Parenting Stress Index – Short Form (PSI-SF).** The PSI-SF is a 36-item assessment completed by parents that identifies dysfunctional parenting and predicts the potential for parental behavior problems and child adjustment difficulties. It is a briefer version of the 120-item Parenting Stress Index, and can be completed by parents of children ages 1 month to 12 years.
- 2) **The Parenting Relationship Questionnaire (PRQ).** The PRQ is an assessment of parents' perceptions of the following parenting practices: attachment, communication, discipline, involvement, confidence, satisfaction with child's school, and relational frustration. It is available in two versions: a 45-item assessment for parents of preschool children (ages 2-5), and a 71-item assessment for parents of older, school-aged children (ages 6-18).
- 3) **The Eyberg Child Behavior Inventory (ECBI).** The ECBI is a 36-item assessment of parents' perceptions of the frequency of their child's behaviors (specifically, conduct-related problems) and whether or not those behaviors are a problem. The Inventory can be completed by parents of children ages 2 to 16.

Parents completed the assessments prior to their participation in the first lesson of *Back to Basics* (pretest), and again immediately following the last lesson (posttest).

Limitations of the data

A smaller number of parents participated in the pilot than anticipated and, in some cases, provided incomplete data about their parenting and/or their children's behavior. As a result, too few assessments were available for an analysis of change over time. In the absence of matched assessments from individual parents, it is not possible to determine individual improvements or declines in parenting and child behavior, only group averages at each point in time. These results are presented below. Analysis of matched cases will be conducted in the full evaluation when more data are available.

Parenting outcomes

For the sample of parents included in the pilot phase, the limited data indicate that, on average, participating parents were within the normal range of behavior at pretest on all domains of behavior assessed by the Parenting Stress Index – Short Form (PSI-SF). Scores on the Parent-Child Dysfunctional Interaction scale, which measures parents’ perceptions of whether their child is meeting their expectations and whether their interactions with their child are reinforcing to the parent, was approaching a clinical (problematic) level. At posttest, mean scores on the Difficult Child scales fell within the clinical range. This subscale focuses on the basic behavioral characteristics of children that make them either easy or difficult to manage. The average percentile ranking for Total Stress, which indicates the stress level experienced within the role of the parent based on the other subscale scales, was also high and approaching a clinically significant level at posttest (Figure 15).

T-scores and corresponding percentile rankings on the Parenting Relationship Questionnaire (PRQ) indicate that at both pretest and posttest, parents in the pilot phase generally fell into the “average” or “above average” range on each subscale, indicating healthy parenting in the areas of attachment, communication, discipline practices, involvement, parenting confidence, and satisfaction with their child’s schooling. Scores were particularly high (“normal”) in many of these areas at posttest. In contrast, scores on the Relational Frustration subscale were quite high at both pretest and posttest (in the “significantly above average” range), which in this circumstance, is indicative of a high level of frustration that should be monitored carefully and may require intervention (Figure 16).

15. Parenting Stress Index – Short Form results

Domains	Possible range	(N=11)		(N=8-9)	
		Pretest mean–raw score	Percentile rank	Posttest mean–raw score	Percentile rank
Parental Distress	12 – 60	23.8	40%	25.9	55%
Parent-Child Dysfunctional Interaction	12 – 60	24.6	80%	23.5	75%
Difficult Child	12 – 60	28.8	70%	36.2	90%
Total Stress	36 – 180	76.5	70%	84.8	85%

Note. Percentile ranks are rounded to the nearest percentile. The normal range for scores is within the 15th to 80th percentiles. High scores are considered to be scores at or above the 85th percentile. Parents who obtain a Total Stress score above a raw score of 90 (at or above the 90th percentile) are experiencing clinically significant levels of stress.

16. Parenting Relationship Questionnaire results

Domains	(N=10-12)		(N=5)	
	Pretest mean T-score	Percentile rank	Posttest mean T-score	Percentile rank
Attachment	56.6	67%	55.4	63%
Communication	49.8	50%	49.6	50%
Discipline practices	52.9	56%	57.0	71%
Involvement	55.9	63%	56.6	71%
Parenting confidence	53.5	59%	55.4	66%
Satisfaction with school	51.5	56%	61.6	63%
Relational frustration	60.8	73%	65.4	77%

Note. For all domains, T-scores can be classified into the following ranges: 10-30 (lower extreme), 31-40 (significantly below average), 41-59 (average), 60-69 (significantly above average), and 70+ (upper extreme). Scores in the lower extreme range (but upper extreme for Relational Frustration) typically require diagnosis or intervention planning, while scores in the significantly below average range may be “subclinical” indicators of temporary issues that will remit.

Child outcomes

The Eyberg Child Behavior Inventory (ECBI) includes two scales: the Intensity scale, which assesses the frequency with which a child displays a range of behaviors, and the Problem scale, an indication of whether the behavior is a problem for the parent. Based on the small sample of parents from the pilot phase, average scores on the Intensity scale fell within the normal range at both pretest and posttest (i.e., a T-score of less than 60). On the Problem scale, average scores fell into the clinical (problematic) range at pretest, but were within the normal range at posttest (Figure 17).

17. Eyberg Child Behavior Inventory results

Domains	Possible range	(N=4)	(N=6)	(N=4)	(N=5-6)
		Pretest mean raw score	Posttest mean raw score	Pretest mean T-score	Posttest mean T-score
Intensity scale	36 – 252	100.8	85.5	51.3	46.8
Problem scale	0 – 36	18.0	11.6	64.0	56.0

Note. T scores greater than or equal to 60 are clinically significant; scores below 60 are within the normal range. A cut-off T-score of 60 or higher on the Intensity scale indicates severe conduct problems that should be further evaluated for potentially significant psychopathology. A T-score of 60 or higher on the Problem scale identifies a parent who is significantly bothered by the conduct problems of the child.

Lessons learned

Prior to the implementation of the full evaluation, a pilot phase was implemented in the spring and summer of 2009. The pilot allowed for the testing of the selected assessment tools as well as an opportunity to observe ways to improve or streamline the data collection process for parent educators. Feedback was gathered from both parent educators about the administration process, as well as participants about their experience completing the tools (e.g., amount of time needed, comprehension of items). This feedback resulted in a number of modifications that were made to the evaluation process prior to the implementation of the full evaluation in October 2009:

- **Modifying the PRQ.** Because two versions of the PRQ are available (preschool and school-age), and parents may select a “focal child” of any age when completing the tools, parent educators were responsible for: a) identifying the age of the focal child selected by the parent, b) selecting the appropriate version of the PRQ and administering it to each parent, and c) tracking this information over time so the same version of the PRQ was administered at both pretest and posttest. This task proved overly burdensome for instructors, especially those with larger-size classes, and increased the chances that incorrect forms were completed.

To simplify the process, only select items on the preschool-version of the PRQ are administered to parents in the full evaluation. The remaining 22 items are relevant to parents of children of all ages (2-18), eliminating the need for parent educators to select the appropriate version of the tool for each parent. It reduces the number of scales for which information will be gathered (attachment, discipline practices, and involvement only), but increases the likelihood that this information will be complete and valid. Information that was provided by the now excluded scales (communication, parenting confidence, satisfaction with school, and relational frustration) is captured, in part, by the PSI-SF and the ECBI.

- **Incorporating additional time for the evaluation.** Although parent educators during the pilot were instructed to add approximately 30 minutes to their first and last classes for completion of the evaluation materials, the instructors tended not to allow enough time for the process. The amount of time parents needed to complete the forms varied, with a few parents reporting needing up to an hour (especially those with lower literacy skills). While this was allowed in some cases, other instructors attempted to rush the process, resulting in incomplete forms, and possibly less thoughtful responses on the part of parents, and less time for the lesson itself. As a result, in the full evaluation, parent educators are instructed to add at least 45 minutes to their first and last sessions, or add on additional sessions before and after the six-

session course that are focused almost exclusively on the evaluation. The latter approach has been encouraged to allow the most time possible, if feasible, especially for larger-sized classes. Furthermore, parent educators are now asked explicitly to briefly review the completed evaluation materials when parents turn them in, to ensure sections or pages of the tools were not inadvertently omitted.

- **Expanded orientation to the evaluation.** During the pilot phase, all instructors participated in a conference call with Wilder Research to review the materials and the process for administering the tools. In some cases, instructors did not have the opportunity to review the materials prior to the call. This may have resulted in some confusion during the administration process, as evidenced by missing or incomplete forms. As a result, during the full evaluation, instructors are now required to review all materials prior to the call, and each phase of the process is carefully explained to the instructor by Wilder Research during the conference call to ensure comprehension. All instructors receive a detailed protocol outlining the evaluation procedures, which has also been enhanced during the full evaluation to increase clarity about the process.
- **Separate mailings of the pretest and posttest materials.** During the pilot phase, instructors received all of the materials they needed for the evaluation, including forms for instructors to complete, pretest packets for parents, posttest packets for parents, gift cards and related information, and other miscellaneous materials. To further simplify the process for parent educators, each now receives separate mailings prior to pretest and again, prior to posttest, including only the materials they need at each data collection time point.
- **Addition of child health question.** Per the suggestion of a parent educator, a question about the focal child's health was added to the Wilder Research-developed Family Information Form during the full evaluation. Parents are now asked to provide information about any conditions or disabilities their child may have, which will be taken into account when analyzing the child behavior outcome data.
- **Individual incentives for parent educators.** Practical Parent Education (PPE) offers agency-level incentives for those who agree to participate in the evaluation, including a one-time waiver of the annual subscription fee (\$75) for current subscribers, or a free subscription (\$750 value) for new PPE subscribers. As a supplement to this incentive, Wilder Research is now providing parent educators who participate in the full evaluation and collect information from a minimum of 6 parents per class a \$20 gift card to Amazon.com for their personal use.

Conclusions and next steps

Preliminary data collected during the pilot phase indicates that most parents participating in the PPE *Back to Basics* series were female, Hispanic/Latina, high school graduates with two or more children in their legal custody and annual incomes less than \$20,000. Most had previous experience participating in parent education classes. Parenting status varied; about half were single parents, while the other half reported a co-parenting spouse or partner. Most parents had a moderate level of social support in their lives, and few had recently experienced a stressful event in their lives such as job loss or major illness. According to parents, children were doing relatively well in school and getting along with peers and, to a somewhat lesser degree, teachers.

Limited data were available about parenting and child outcomes, so analysis of change over time in these areas was not possible. On average, parents' scores fell into the normal range on many parenting behaviors, although some did fall into the clinical range in certain areas (i.e., Difficult Child and Total Stress subscale scores from the PSI-SF at posttest, and the Relational Frustration subscale score from the PRQ at pretest and posttest). The frequency of children's displays of problematic behaviors as perceived by parents fell into the normal range at pretest and posttest. Parents' reports as to whether these behaviors were a problem was within the clinical range at pretest, but in the normal range at posttest.

Next steps

During the current, full evaluation phase (October 2009 – July 2010), information about parenting practices and child behavior is continuing to be collected prior to, and at the conclusion of, the six-session course taught by parent educators. The 6- and 12-month follow-up telephone interviews with parents will begin in June 2010 and continue through summer 2011. In addition, during this period, similar information will be collected from a comparison group of parents who are not participating in the *Back to Basics* series.

Two additional reports summarizing the findings will be prepared: a) an interim report in the summer of 2010, which will include an analysis of the pretest/posttest data collected to-date, and c) a final report in late summer 2011, including a synthesis of the full evaluation results.