Strengthening Families

Summary

Strengthening Families is a parent, youth, and family skills-building curriculum designed to prevent teen substance abuse and other behavior problems, strengthen parenting skills, and build family strengths through a program developed by professionals at Iowa State University Extension. The evidence-based program is being conducted in New York State by Cornell Cooperative Extension.

Issue

Parenting skills are essential for promoting child well-being, but many parents struggle with how to parent effectively and meet both their own needs and those of their children. Parents benefit from resources, information, and skills to support them with the challenges they face in raising their children.

Response

Strengthening Families is a parent, youth (10-14 years old), and family skills-building curriculum designed to:

- help parents and caregivers learn nurturing skills that support their children,
- teach parents and caregivers how to effectively discipline and guide their youth,
- give youth a healthy future orientation and an increased appreciation of their parents and caregivers, and
- teach youth skills for dealing with stress and peer pressure.

Impact

A recent evaluation of this highly successful program documents outcomes from eight sessions of the Strengthening Families Program offered to 59 adults and 62 youth in New York State by Cornell Cooperative Extension educators from January through November, 2007 across Albany, Jefferson, Orange, Tompkins, and Warren counties and in New York City.

In comparing the adult caregiver pre- and post-test survey results, ten of the 20 questions showed positive outcomes as a result of participating in the program. Six of these questions showed highly significant positive changes at the 1% level.

- I wait to deal with problems with my child until I have cooled down.
- I remember that it is normal for children to be harder to get along with at this age.
- I follow through with consequences each time he/she breaks a rule.
- I talk to my child about his/her future goals without criticizing.
• I spend special one-on-one time with my youth.
• I give compliments and rewards when my child does chores at home or follows rules.

Like those of the caregivers, youth results were very positive with statistically significant outcomes on more than half of the 15 questions asked of youth before participating in the Strengthening Families Program and again following program completion. The following questions showed positive changes that were highly significant.

• If a friend suggests that we do something that can get us both into trouble, I am able to get out of doing that.
• We have family meetings to discuss plans, schedules, and rules.
• I listen to my parent(s)’ point of view on a problem without yelling or getting mad.
• My parent(s) are calm when they discipline me.
• I feel truly loved and respected by my parents.

Both parents and youth indicated that their families were working together more cooperatively by the end of the program.

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