



Parents as Teachers: A Child Abuse and Neglect Prevention Program

Research shows that Parents as Teachers is an effective prevention program for child abuse and neglect.

- Reduction in parent stress, potential abuse, and numbers of actual abuse cases are three ways of evaluating program effectiveness.¹
- In a randomized trial, adolescent mothers who received case management and PAT were significantly less likely to be subjected to child abuse investigations than control group mothers who received neither case management nor PAT.²
- In another randomized trial, adolescent mothers in an urban community who participated in PAT for three years scored lower on a child maltreatment precursor scale than mothers in the control group. These adolescent mothers showed greater improvement in knowledge of discipline, showed more positive involvement with children, and organized their home environment in a way more conducive to child development.³
- Potential abuse includes number of injuries and ingestions treated. In the same randomized trial in one urban community, children in the PAT group, at age 3, were more likely to be fully immunized and less likely to be treated for injury in the previous year.⁴
- PAT families had fewer documented cases of abuse and neglect in comparison to the state average, based on the “Second Wave” study which examined 400 families enrolled in 37 diverse school districts across Missouri.⁵

Parents as Teachers is a universal primary prevention model for child abuse and neglect.

- PAT is a universal model because it serves all families regardless of their risk levels. Universal programs are primary prevention.⁶
- Primary prevention programs, like PAT, play a *crucial* role in reducing as well as preventing new cases from occurring. The U.S. Advisory Board on Child Abuse and Neglect defines primary prevention programs as those that “counteract etiological factors before they have a chance to produce child abuse in the next generation.”⁷
- Secondary prevention programs target particular populations who may be at risk for child abuse and neglect. PAT also serves as a secondary prevention program at times. Examples are programs specifically for adolescent parents, families living in poverty, and young military families living in stressful situations.
- One of the four goals of Parents as Teachers is to prevent child abuse and neglect.

¹ Sweet, M. A. & Appelbaum, M.I. (2004). Is home visiting an effective strategy: A meta-analytic review of home visiting programs for families with young children. *Child Development*, 75, 1435-1456.

² Wagner, M.M. & Clayton, S.L. (1999). The Parents as Teachers Program: Results from Two Demonstrations. *The Future of Children: Home Visiting: Recent Program Evaluations*, 9(1), 91-115.

³Wagner, M., Iida, E. & Spiker, D. (2001). The multisite evaluation of the Parents as Teachers home visiting program: Three-year findings from one community. Menlo Park, CA: SRI International.

⁴ Wagner, M., Iida, E. & Spiker, D. (2001).

⁵ Pfannenstiel, J., Lambson, T., & Yarnell, V. (1991). *Second wave study of the Parents as Teachers program*. Overland Park, KS: Research & Training Associates.

⁶ Harder, J. (2005). *Prevention of Child Abuse and Neglect: Best Practices*. Prepared for Statewide Prevention Plan Prevent Child Abuse Nebraska. Retrieved from http://myweb.unomaha.edu/~jharder/CANResearch/Statewide_Prevention_Plan.pdf on March 13, 2007.

⁷ Panel on Research on Child Abuse and Neglect, Commission on Behavioral and Social Sciences and Education, National Research Council (1993). *Understanding child abuse and neglect*. Washington, D.C.: National Academy Press, p. 40.

Parents as Teachers addresses major risk factors of child abuse and neglect by improving parenting skills and the child's home environment for our youngest children.

- The U.S. Advisory Board on Child Abuse and Neglect writes that one of the goals of preventive interventions is “to reduce risk factors associated with child abuse and neglect.”⁸
- Risk factors for child abuse and neglect include lack of parenting skills, unrealistic expectations for a child's capabilities, lack of knowledge about normal child development, unhealthy or insecure attachment, parental stress, poor basic health care for children, and lack of support networks for parents.⁹
- Short-term outcomes of Parents as Teachers include improved parenting practices, increased knowledge and practice of positive discipline techniques, more realistic expectations of age-appropriate developmental milestones, a home environment conducive to healthy child development, parent-child attachment, reduction of stress, fulfillment of basic needs, opportunities to interact with other parents, and increased awareness and access to sources of information and support.¹⁰
- PAT national quality standards require a minimum of one developmental, vision, hearing, dental, and health screening per program year for all enrolled children.¹¹
- PAT serves families with children up to kindergarten entry. In 2004, 81% of the fatalities from child abuse and neglect concerned children younger than 4 years old.¹²
- PAT parent educators focus on increasing parents' knowledge of early child development, which enhances parent-child attachment, and in turn helps reduce child maltreatment. As Perry writes, “the majority of attachment problems are likely due to parental ignorance about development ... Many parents have not been educated about the critical nature of the experiences of the first three years of life. With more public education and policy support for these areas, this will improve.”¹³

Home visitation programs, such as Parents as Teachers, have been recognized as a proven intervention for supporting parents in reducing child abuse and neglect.

- The U.S. Advisory Board on Child Abuse and Neglect states, “home visiting and center-based programs with a parental focus can help prevent child abuse and neglect.”¹⁴
- The Task Force on Community Preventive Services recommends early childhood home visitation as an effective method for preventing child abuse and neglect.¹⁵
- PAT is listed as a model or a promising program in several evidence-based program resources including Promising Practices Network, Strengthening America's Families, Helping America's Youth, and Center for the Application of Substance Abuse Technologies.¹⁶
- Child Welfare Information Gateway lists Parents as Teachers as an effective Prevention Program for child abuse and neglect which promotes healthy families.¹⁷
- Child Welfare League of America features Parents as Teachers as an effective model program which benefits parents, children, and communities.¹⁸

⁸ Panel on Research on Child Abuse and Neglect (1993), p. 161.

⁹ Powell, C. (2003). Early indicators of child abuse and neglect: A multi-professional Delphi study. *Child Abuse Review*, 12, 25-40.

¹⁰ Parents as Teachers National Center, Inc. *Born to Learn logic model*.

¹¹ Parents as Teachers National Center, Inc. (2003). *A Closer Look...The PAT Standards and Self-Assessment Guide*. St. Louis, MO: Parents as Teachers National Center, Inc.

¹² Child Welfare Information Gateway (2006). Child Abuse and Neglect Fatalities: Statistics and Interventions. Retrieved from <http://www.childwelfare.gov> on March 16, 2007.

¹³ Perry, B.D. (2001). Bonding and Attachment in Maltreated Children: Consequences of emotional neglect in childhood, p. 7. Retrieved from www.ChildTrauma.org on March 13, 2007.

¹⁴ Panel on Research on Child Abuse and Neglect (1993), p. 169.

¹⁵ Hahn, R.A., Bilukha, O.O., Crosby, A., Fullilove, M.T., Liberman, A., Moscicki, E.K., et al. (2003). First reports evaluating the effectiveness of strategies for preventing violence: Early childhood home visitation. *Center for Disease Control, Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report*, 52, 109.

¹⁶ These resources are listed in the conference brochure “Better Practice Better Outcomes: Using Evidence-Based Practice to Build Stronger Families”, March 19-20, 2007, Wilmington, NC.

¹⁷ Child Welfare Information Gateway. Retrieved from http://www.childwelfare.gov/preventing/promoting/parent_ed_programs.cfm on March 15, 2007.

¹⁸ Child Welfare League of America (2005). *Moving from Research to Practice*. Retrieved from <http://www.cwla.org> on March 16, 2007.