



Evaluating the effectiveness of “Beyond the Basics” Parenting Groups¹

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What is “Beyond the Basics”?

“Beyond the Basics” is a 10-session group program on effective parenting skills. It is designed for parents and caregivers of children up to age 6, who are required or recommended by the child welfare system to attend parenting education classes. The

Objectives of “Beyond the Basics” Parenting Groups

“Beyond the Basics” has both short- and long-term learning objectives for parents.

Short-term objectives are to:

- increase parental knowledge of appropriate parenting skills
- increase parental knowledge of alternatives to physical discipline
- increase parental knowledge of the developmental stages of children aged 0 to 6
- increase positive parenting skills
- improve the quality of child-parent interactions
- decrease the use of physical/negative discipline
- provide knowledge acquisition in a supportive milieu

Long-term objectives are to:

- maintain knowledge learned by parents
- increase parents’ positive parenting skills
- reduce child maltreatment
- increase parents’ use of community/social supports

“Beyond the Basics” Parenting Group was developed by Aisling Discoveries Child and Family Centre in Scarborough, Ontario.

In 2003 and 2004, a group of social service agencies, led by the Children’s Aid Society of Toronto, collaboratively offered the program at community sites across Toronto. With the assistance of the Centre of Excellence for Child Welfare, the agencies developed and conducted an evaluation of the program’s effectiveness and the parents’ satisfaction with it.

The program was offered to groups of 12 to 15 parents with at least one child under age 6, who were actively involved with one of Toronto’s four child welfare agencies. The parents voluntarily participated in the evaluation and were referred to the program by a child welfare worker. A total of 95 parents participated in the program and its evaluation. This information sheet describes the “Beyond the Basics” Parenting Group and summarizes the results of the evaluation.

Why are parenting programs important for parents involved with child welfare?

Parents play a key role in the healthy development of their children. Positive interactions, such as when parents praise, support, warmly engage with, and show affection for their children, are important elements of effective childrearing.

Conversely, parenting practices that neglect the basic physical or emotional needs of children, such as those that impose unrealistic expectations, have harsh treatment, or overly lax or overly punitive discipline, can contribute to the child developing physical, social, and emotional difficulties. Effective parenting skills can be taught, and an impressive body of evidence

shows that supportive education programs, run by effective instructors, and customized to parents' needs, can change adverse patterns of parent-child interactions.²

It can be especially difficult for parents involved with child welfare to participate in community parenting groups. They can feel stigmatized when other group participants learn that their children are in care, or are involved with child welfare.

Topics covered in “Beyond the Basics” Parenting Groups

The program sessions cover specific aspects of parenting.

- Week 1: **Getting Started**
the challenges of parenting
- Week 2: **Learning Through Play**
child development
- Week 3: **Appropriate Discipline**
discipline without hitting, spanking, or shaking
- Week 4: **Inappropriate Discipline**
ways that are not appropriate to discipline a child
- Week 5: **Time Out!** ways to guide and re-direct children's behaviour
- Week 6: **The Importance of Routines**
ways to help add structure and routines to benefit children
- Week 7: **Munching without Misery**
ways to improve feeding and mealtimes
- Week 8: **Quality Family Activities**
ways to help increase family outings and activities
- Week 9: **Building Self Esteem**
ways to boost parents' and children's self-esteem
- Week 10: **Review, Feedback and Celebration**
the opportunity to recognize goal achievement

Furthermore, some community parenting groups require the parents to have the child with them in order to attend the program, which is not always possible for parents involved with child welfare.

What are the characteristics of the “Beyond the Basics” program?

“Beyond the Basics” Parenting Groups focus on parenting practices appropriate for children age 6 or younger, as young children are very vulnerable to the negative effects of abusive or neglectful parenting.³

The curriculum, as well as a resource manual and training program for facilitators, have been developed to encourage active learning through participation. The program, which is delivered by one male and one female facilitator, has the following key characteristics:

- It provides information about positive parenting practices in order to increase knowledge of child development, appropriate discipline techniques, and child safety;
- It stresses effective parenting techniques, such as the importance of routines, and the use of “time-outs” to guide and re-direct a child's behaviour, which increase parents' confidence in their parenting role;
- It takes a strength-based, family-centred approach;
- It gives information about community resources available to participants.

Who participated in the evaluation?

A total of 95 parents in nine groups held at five different community sites in Toronto participated in the “Beyond the Basics” program and evaluation. Nearly half were mothers attending without partners, 12 were fathers attending without partners, and 18 were couples. Parents had an average of 1.8 children per family for a combined total of 143 children. Nearly half (47%) of the 91 participants who completed a parent questionnaire had not completed high school, and 26% indicated that they had full-time employment. One quarter indicated that they experienced health and mental health issues and 22% indicated that they had a disability.

How was effectiveness assessed?

The parents who participated in the evaluation were asked to 1) fill out a questionnaire before starting

Table 1: Summary of the “Beyond the Basics” Parenting Group evaluation

	Study question	Outcome	Evidence	Source
Satisfaction	Are parents satisfied with the service?	Yes	89% rated it “excellent” (62%) or “good” (27%)	Self-Report
	Would parents recommend the group?	Yes	94% would recommend BBPG to another parent	Self-Report
Knowledge Changes	Did parents learn more about child development ?	Yes	$p = .04$ (difference from pre-test: post-test scores) Parents said they “learned more” about child development	Self-Report
	Did parents learn more non-physical child discipline methods?	Yes	$p = .00$ (difference from pre-test: post-test scores) Parents said they “learned more” about non-physical child discipline	Self-Report
	Did parents learn more about how to use community supports ?	Yes	$p = .05$ (difference from pre-test: post-test scores) Parents said they “learned more” about community support use	Self-Report
Attitude Changes	Did the program change how parents view their parenting role?	Yes	$p = .000$ (from pre-test: post-test = positive change) $p = .000$ (from post-test: follow up = positive change)	AAPI-2
	Did the program change high-risk parent’s views on use of corporal punishment / physical discipline?	Suggested	Pre-test 3.4% (% high-risk parents) dropped to post-test 2.3% (% high-risk parents)	AAPI-2
Behaviour Changes	Did the program change parent’s use of physical discipline (PD)?	Yes	$p = .001$ Pre-test (65% say “never use PD”) to to post-test (93% say “never use PD”)	Self-Report

the program and after completing it (“self-reports”), and 2) fill out the Adult-Adolescent Parenting Inventory (AAPI-2), which is a standardized inventory that assesses parenting and child-rearing attitudes. The AAPI-2 gives an index of the risk for parenting behaviour known to be associated with child maltreatment. The parents completed the AAPI-2 inventory before the group started (pre-test), at the end of group sessions (post-test), and 3 months after the group ended (follow-up test).

Is the “Beyond the Basics” Parenting Group program effective?

Table 1 summarizes the results of the questionnaires and the parenting inventory. Overall, parents indicated that they were satisfied with the program, which was effective in advancing parents’ knowledge about child development and improving parenting attitudes.

When asked whether they used physical discipline with their child, the differences in responses before and after the program indicated that parents learned that they should not use physical discipline with their child. This could be interpreted as learning to provide a safer environment with less risk for future maltreatment for the child.

When asked to comment on the “Beyond the Basics” Parenting Group program, parents provided a number of reasons for recommending the program to others, including, “I learned more about raising children and how easy it can be using good parenting skills.”

- 1 This information sheet is based on the report: Goodman, D. & Richards, S. (2005). *Evaluating the effectiveness of “Beyond the Basics” parenting groups for parents/caregivers of young children involved with child welfare*. Toronto, ON: University of Toronto, Faculty of Social Work.
- 2 Bowes, J. (2000). Response of parents to parent education and support programs: a review of evaluation research on some key USA programs. Paper presented at 7th Australian Institute of Family Studies Conference. Retrieved January 26, 2006 from <http://www.aifs.gov.au/institute/afrc7/bowes.html>.
- 3 Azar, S. (1989). Training parents of abused children. In C. Schaefer & J. Briesmeister (Eds.), *Handbook of parent training: parents as co-therapists for children’s behaviour problems*. (pp. 414-441). New York, NY: Wiley Press.

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