Beyond the Parent-Child Dyad: New Preventive Interventions based on Family Systems Theory and Research

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Penn State Research Associates who contributed to this research include Michelle Hostetler, Damon Jones, Richard Puddy, Kari-Lyn Sakuma, and Jill Zeruth.
Mom → Kid → Dad
Couple Conflict →

Parent-related Outcomes:
- depression
- parenting quality (emotional availability, harsh)
- family violence
- parent-child relations

Child Outcomes:
- attachment security
- child depression, aggression
- school outcomes
- substance use
- peer and partner relationship problems
A Refinement: Coparenting Quality

- Shared parenting responsibility & coordination
- More precise
- Linked, but separate
- Stronger predictor
- Buffer
Domains of Co-parenting

- Joint Family Management
- Division Of Labor
- Childrearing Agreement
- Support/Undermining

Feinberg, 2003
Theoretical Model

Parenting

Child Outcomes

Parental Adjustment

Couple Relationship

Father characteristics

Mother characteristics

Environmental Stress/Support

Coparenting alliance

Child Temperament
TRANSITION
Structure

Topics Covered

• Expectations
• Co-parenting
• Parenting
Trial 1: Participants

- 167 couples

**Eligibility**
- First-time parents
- Living together
- Over 18 years old

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Wave 1 Characteristics</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>SD</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mother Age</td>
<td>28.42</td>
<td>4.89</td>
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<tr>
<td>Father Age</td>
<td>29.87</td>
<td>5.53</td>
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<td>Family Income</td>
<td>$64,593</td>
<td>$34,233</td>
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<td>Mother Education</td>
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<tr>
<td>Father Education</td>
<td>14.54</td>
<td>2.19</td>
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<tr>
<td>% Married</td>
<td>83</td>
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<tr>
<td>% Non-Hispanic White</td>
<td>92</td>
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Participant Comments:

‘I am thankful I am included in these classes... this will help me to be a better parent’.

‘This class is worthwhile and quite frankly more than I originally expected’.

‘I think these classes are perfect for first-time parents’.

‘It’s an enjoyable class. It’s helpful in getting us to think realistically about having a child’.
Family Outcomes: Through Child Age 3  
(compared to randomized control group)

- **Coparenting:**
  - more support, less competition/triangulation

- **Couple relationship:** more affection

- **Parental Adjustment:**
  - More confidence (parental efficacy)
  - Less parental stress
  - Less depression

- **Parenting:**
  - More warmth, sensitivity
  - Less negativity, harshness, over-reactivity
Family Outcomes: Through Child Age 3  
(compared to randomized control group)

**Children**

- Better attention span
- More capacity for self-regulation
- Fewer behavior problems
Intervention Effects on Violence?

- No significant main effects on parental aggression or psychological IPV

- Moderation effects:
  - **Psychological IPV at baseline** moderated intervention effects on psychological maltreatment of child and mothers’ psychological IPV
  - **Couple Conflict** and **Arguing at baseline** moderated intervention effects on mothers’ physical maltreatment of child
  - Additional trend-level effects showing similar patterns
Moderation Effect

Intervention Effect on Psychological P-C Aggression Frequency
Moderated by Pre-Test Psychological IPV Frequency

- Low psych IPV
- High psych IPV

- Control
- Intervention
Moderation Effect

Intervention Effect on Mothers’ Physical P-C Aggression Frequency
Moderated by Pre-Test Couple Conflict

![Bar chart showing the effect of intervention on mothers' physical aggression frequency moderated by pre-test couple conflict. The chart compares the control and intervention groups in low and high conflict scenarios.]
Does Program Engagement Predict Outcomes?

Participant Engagement ($\alpha > .90$):

1) Number of classes attended
2) Group leader ratings (4 items, $\alpha = .80$)
3) Self-reported homework completion

3 outcome domains:

- Interparental relationship
- Parental adjustment
- Parenting (overreactivity, laxness)

Multilevel regression models controlling for:

- Age, Marital status, Income, Education, Financial strain, Social desirability, Parent gender, Child gender, Anxiety, Couple love
Engagement Predicts Outcomes

- Postnatal engagement predicts:
  \[ \beta = .32^{*}, \ S.E. = .13 \] for Relationship Satisfaction
  \[ \beta = .15^{*}, \ S.E. = .07 \] for Coparenting

- Null findings for Parental Adjustment and Parenting outcome domains
Other Research Projects with this Data

• Prenatal parent cortisol linked to couple violence, and link to couple interaction moderated by chronic stress (Damon Jones)

• Prenatal violence: measurement, links to parenting (Marni Kan, HDFS PhD)

• Prenatal couple conflict predicts early family environment (Megan Goslin, Psych PhD)

• Division of labor & gender (Beth Riina, HDFS)
  – Task-focused vs. relationship caregiving linked to parent adjustment for moms vs. dads (x gender role attitudes)

• Coparenting and infant temperament predict parent adjustment (Anna Solmeyer, HDFS)

• Executive functioning at age 3 linked to externalizing (Kari-Lyn Sakuma)
Lots More Data

- Early feeding/eating
- Child Sleep
- Parent sexual satisfaction
- Coded observational data at multiple time points on couple, parent-child, and triadic interaction
- Etc...
Current FF Trials

• Trial of integrated FF and Childbirth Ed, “Childbirth Plus”. Target N=440 families
  – R21: Relations of daily stress and family relations, with daily diary methodology at pre- and post-test (Laurenceau, Almeida; funded)
  – R21: Intensive, periodic interviews to assess couple and parent-child physical aggression (Amy Marshall; pending)

• Trial of DVD/workbook home-study version. Target 210 families.
Future FF Adaptations for...

- Adoptive families (Janet Welsh, pending)
- Teen parents (Children’s National Medical Center, DC; pending)
- Prenatal home visiting (Robert Ammerman, in preparation)
- Couples at risk for family violence (Marni Kan, in preparation)

Wish List:
- Spanish-speaking couples
- Gay/lesbian couples
Children in the U.S. are more likely to grow up in a household with a sibling or a father?

European-American children in US spend more time with siblings, friends, or parents?

Non-White children?
Siblings and sibling relations influence which outcomes?

A. Social competence, peer relations
B. Educational attainment
C. Childhood depression
D. Externalizing behaviors
E. Substance Use
F. Romantic relationship quality
G. Mental health in the elderly
Sibling Relations \(\rightarrow\) Processes and Contexts \(\rightarrow\) Proximal risk \(\rightarrow\) Problem Behaviors

- Generalized Coercive Style
- Sibling Negativity / Coercion
- Impaired Parenting
Sibling Relations → Processes and Contexts → Proximal risk → Problem Behaviors

- Generalized Coercive Style
- Sibling Negativity / Coercion
- Impaired Parenting

→ School problems
→ Peer problems
→ Deviant Peers
→ Sibling Deviance Training
Sibling Relations → Processes and Contexts → Proximal risk → Problem Behaviors

- Generalized Coercive Style
- School problems
- Peer problems
- Deviant Peers
- Sibling Deviance Training
- Unsupervised Activities
- Impaired Parenting
Siblings Are Special!

- Afterschool groups of siblings
- 1 group = 4 sibling dyads
  - Older Sibling: 5th grade
  - Younger Sibling: 2nd - 4th Grade
- 2 Group Leaders
- 12 Afterschool Sessions (1.5 hours)
- 3 Family Nights (2.5 hours)
# Siblings Are Special - Study Design

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<td>Intervention</td>
<td>Posttest</td>
<td>Follow-up</td>
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## Notes
- **Pretest**
- **Intervention**
- **Posttest**
- **Follow-up**
# Siblings Are Special - Study Design

## Cohort 1
- **Sample size**: 16 Schools, 128 Families
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## Cohort 2
- **Sample size**: 6 Schools, 48 Families

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**TOTAL N = 176 Families**
Siblings Are Special - Themes

• Traffic Light
  – Red Light: Stop, Breathe, Say
  – Yellow Light: Ears, Agree
  – Green Light: Make the Deal

• Compliment Circle

• TEAM (Traffic Lights, Ears, Agree, Make a Deal)
  – Increase in positive, constructive activities together
  – Focus on positive influences
  – Encourage parental involvement/monitoring
Siblings Are Special- Feasibility

• Recruitment: 35-40%

• Attendance
  – 88% Afterschool Sessions
  – 81% FFN1, 73% FFN2, 81% FFN3
Siblings Are Special - Feasibility

- **Group Leader Performance:**
  
  Percent of material presented
  
  GL-report = mean 4.7
  
  Observed = mean 4.0
  
  Scale: (1) <40% (2) 40-60% (3) 60-80% (4) 80-95% (5) 95-100%

- **siblings Engagement in Discussions**
  
  GL report = mean 3.8
  
  Observed = mean 3.2
  
  Scale: (1) Resistant (2) Passively eng. (3) Engaged (4) Very eng. (5) Very enthusiastic
Siblings Are Special- Feasibility

School report from Principal or Counselor
I have heard positive feedback about the program from ...
students = 4.9, parents = 5, teachers = 4.7 (range 1 to 5)
I would recommend the program to other principals = 3.3
(range 1-4: generally recommend = 3, recommend enthusiastically= 4)

Parent report
Program expects (how much) involvement from parents:
mothers/fathers = 3.07/3.03

Scale:
(1) expects too much, (3) just right, (5) expects too little
Next Steps

• Lots of data already!
• Complete planned data collection
• Code sibling and family interaction video
• Extend data collection?
• Larger trial
• Spanish language adaptation
Questions:

Love@psu.edu