Evidence-based Fidelity

What does implementing with fidelity mean?

The degree to which the program curriculum is implemented as it was intended by developers

What are the key components in maintaining program fidelity?

Although each curriculum is unique, research is consistent in indicating that programs implemented with fidelity include an emphasis on five key components

1. Program Integrity Maintenance

Maintaining a program's integrity requires that it is delivered in a way that is consistent with the developers' model. This includes core content, methods, and key activities. Although adaptation may be necessary, it is important to understand the potential risks of the adapting program curricula. For example, eliminating program content and reducing the number of program sessions can reduce the effectiveness of a program, whereas adding materials such as culturally relevant examples and materials that do not change the purpose of the sessions may improve program outcomes.

2. *Program Duration and Exposure*

Program duration refers to the number of sessions (i.e., dosage/exposure/intensity), frequency, length of the sessions, and participant attendance. It is essential not only to implement the number of sessions prescribed by the program model but also to document the actual attendance of participants and to ensure sessions are of an appropriate length (program not too long or too short)4. Participants with greater exposure or higher dosage are more likely to experience positive outcomes. It is also important that sessions are the length (i.e., 1.5 or 2 hours) and frequency (i.e., once per week) recommended by the vendor. The majority of the curricula include homework and activities for parents to practice with their children. Therefore, it is important that parents have not only the time to complete the homework and practice new skills but also the opportunity to reflect on the experience.

3. *Staffing & Quality Delivery*

The quality of delivery refers to how the program is presented to participants and focuses on the facilitator/provider's effectiveness. Programs should follow the curriculum vendors recommendations for the number of staff required for implementing the series. Also, there should be a plan for how a program will handle situations such as the sudden illness or an emergency that necessitates the use of a substitute facilitator.   Facilitators play a key role in the fidelity of implementation because they are responsible for the quality of the program delivery. Aspects of delivery include facilitator's preparedness, ability to deliver program content, level of content knowledge, confidence to answer questions, and communication and interaction style.   It is necessary to provide facilitators with the adequate training and post-training support to assure that they understand the critical components of a program and maintain a high quality of delivery. Additionally, assuring that program facilitators are committed, comfortable with

the material, and have the knowledge and ability to answer questions are essential to assuring the highest level of program quality and achieving program outcomes. Facilitators' "soft skills" such interaction style, enthusiasm, positive attitude, respectfulness, confidence, and communication style are significant and of equal importance to assure program quality and positive outcomes.

4. Parent Engagement

Participants' engagement refers to the level of interest, perceptions of usefulness, and willingness to engage in discussion and participate in activities. Participant engagement is key, as highly engaged parents are more likely to participate in activities and change their behavior.

5. Program Differentiation

Program differentiation refers to the unique features or components that make a program distinct from other similar programs. Each program has unique components that are targeted to specific populations and outcomes. For example, a parenting skills program may include two unique components: general information about child development and specific discipline strategies. These components are unique, but both are related to improving parenting skills. The ability to identify unique program components can help to explain the specific ways in which program outcomes are achieved.

Can curricula be modified and still be implemented with fidelity?

Program adaptations are often sought because of a variety of circumstances including the unique needs of culturally and ethnically diverse families, lack of funding, timing, community partner preferences, etc. However, adaptations may have a negative effect on the outcomes for parents participating in the program. Guidelines addressing acceptable and unacceptable adaptations assure that changes do not jeopardize program effectiveness. *What Works Wisconsin – Research to Practice Series* has provided one of the best examples of guidelines for acceptable and unacceptable adaptations:

Acceptable Adaptations:

- Changing language—translation and modifying vocabulary
- Replacing images to show youth and families that look like the target audience
- Replacing cultural references
- Modifying some aspects of activities such as physical contact
- Adding relevant, evidence-based content to make the program more appealing to participants

Risky or Unacceptable Adaptations:

- Reducing the number of sessions
- Reducing the length of sessions or length of participant involvement
- Lowering the level of participant engagement
- Eliminating key messages or skills to be learned
- Removing key topics

- Changing the theoretical approach

- Using staff or volunteers who are not trained or qualified
- Using fewer staff or volunteers who are not trained or qualified

Program	Curriculum Needed and Cost	Certification/Training Required	Pre/Post Test	Family Engagement	# Of Sessions/Frequency	Program Objective