

BOARD ON CHILDREN, YOUTH, AND FAMILIES  
DIVISION OF BEHAVIORAL AND SOCIAL SCIENCES AND EDUCATION

# Parenting Matters

## Supporting Parents of Children Ages 0-8

**Report Release**  
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# Statement of Task

- Identify parenting knowledge, attitudes, and practices that support positive parent-child interactions and healthy development of children ages 0-8
- Describe strategies that have been found to be effective for supporting parents and helping them carry out parenting practices associated with healthy child development
- Identify barriers and facilitators to strengthening parenting capacity and parents' participation and retention in effective programs and services
- Identify areas for future research to strengthen the evidence on strategies for supporting parents
- Make recommendations to promote the wide-scale adoption of effective strategies across public and private sectors and to health, human services, and education systems

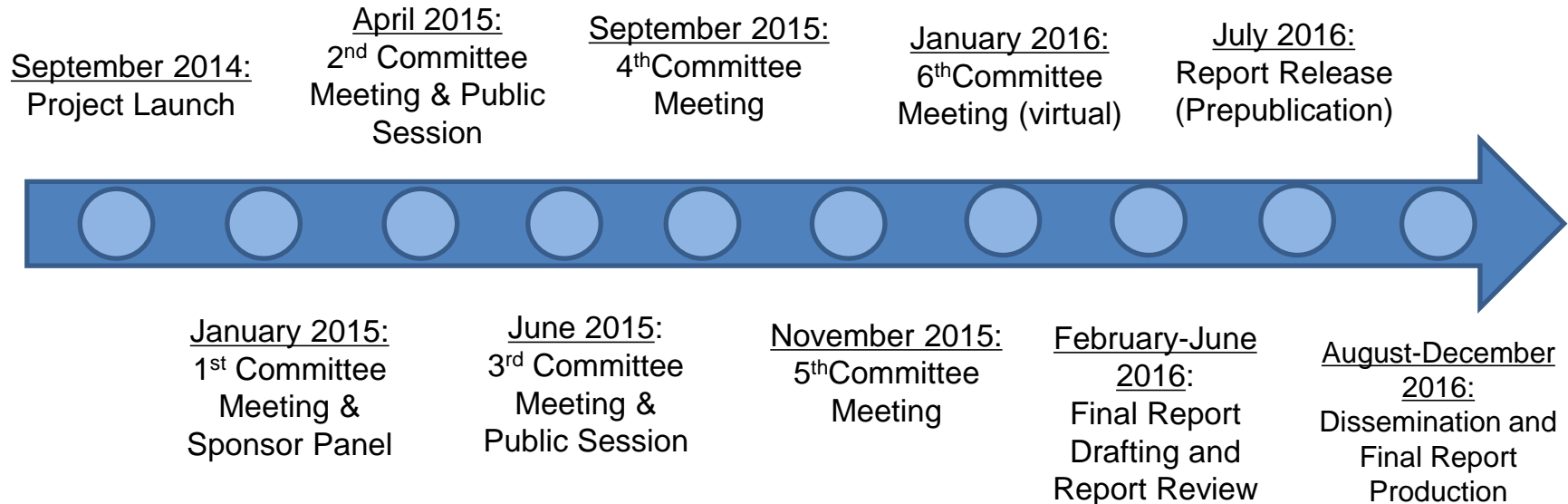
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# Committee Membership

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# Study Timeline



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# Information Gathering

- Reviewed literature on parenting and previous relevant reports from the National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine
- Held two public information gathering sessions to hear from researchers, practitioners, parents, and other stakeholders
- Conducted group and individual semi-structured interviews with parents
- Commissioned papers
  - The Role of Healthcare in Supporting Parents of Children Ages 0-8
  - Evidence for Investing in Parenting Programs at Scale
  - Parenting and Children's Mental and Behavioral Health

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# Report Chapters

**Chapter 1:** Introduction

**Chapter 2:** Parenting Knowledge, Attitudes, and Practices

**Chapter 3:** Federal Policies and Investments Supporting Parents and Children in the United States

**Chapter 4:** Universal/Preventive and Widely Used Interventions

**Chapter 5:** Targeted Interventions Supporting Parents of Children with Special Needs, Parents Facing Special Adversities, and Parents Involved with Child Welfare Services

**Chapter 6:** Elements of Effective Parenting Programs and Strategies for Increasing Program Participation and Retention

**Chapter 7:** Toward a National Framework

**Chapter 8:** Conclusions and Recommendations

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# Committee's Major Findings, Conclusions, and Recommendations

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# Parenting Knowledge, Attitudes, and Practices

- Knowledge
  - Parental knowledge of child development is positively associated with quality parent-child interactions and parents' engagement in practices that promote children's healthy development.
  - Parents with knowledge of evidence-based parenting practices, especially those related to promoting children's physical health and safety (e.g., injury prevention), are more likely than those without such knowledge to engage in those practices.
- Attitudes
  - Parents' attitudes about the roles of parents and others in the raising of young children, as well as about specific practices (e.g., breastfeeding, the role of parents in children's education), contribute to some variation in practices and in the uptake of services for families among individuals and subpopulations.

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# Parenting Knowledge, Attitudes, and Practices

- Practices
  - Parenting practices associated with positive child outcomes in the areas of physical health and safety, emotional and behavioral competence, social competence, and cognitive competence, include:
    - contingent responsiveness (“serve and return”)—adult behavior that occurs immediately after a child's behavior and that is related to the child's focus of attention, such as a parent smiling back at a child;
    - showing warmth and sensitivity;
    - routines and reduced household chaos;
    - shared book reading and talking to children;
    - practices that promote children's health and safety—in particular, receipt of prenatal care, breastfeeding, vaccination, ensuring children's adequate nutrition and physical activity, monitoring, and household/vehicle safety; and
    - use of appropriate (less harsh) discipline.

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# Interventions to Support Parents and Parenting: Scaling Effective Interventions

- The committee identified several interventions that promote effective parenting practices. These include
  - formal sources of parenting support (e.g., well-child care, center-based child care)
  - parent skills training programs
  - interventions targeted to specific populations of parents (e.g., parents facing adversities, such as mental illness, substance abuse, and poverty)
- Many families that could benefit from interventions do not receive them. Better leveraging services, such as health care and early care and education, with which many parents already have ongoing connections as points of intervention and referral would improve the reach of effective strategies.

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# Interventions to Support Parents and Parenting: Scaling Effective Interventions

**Recommendation 1:** The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, the U.S. Department of Education, state and local agencies, and community-based organizations responsible for the implementation of services that reach large numbers of families (e.g., health care, early care and education, community programs) should form a working group to identify points in the delivery of these services at which evidence-based strategies for supporting parents can be implemented, and referral of parents to needed resources can be enhanced.

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# Interventions to Support Parents and Parenting: Scaling Effective Interventions

- Research is needed to inform the creation of a system for efficiently disseminating evidence-based programs and services to the field and for ensuring that communities learn about them, are able to assess fit with community needs, develop needed adaptations, and monitor fidelity and progress toward targeted outcomes.
- Findings from this research could be used in an ongoing way to inform the integration of evidence-based interventions into widely used service platforms.

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# Interventions to Support Parents and Parenting: Scaling Effective Interventions

**Recommendation 2:** The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, the Institute of Education Sciences, the Patient-Centered Outcomes Research Institute, and private philanthropies should fund research focused on developing guidance for policy makers and program administrators and managers on how to scale effective parenting programs as widely and rapidly as possible.

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# Enhancing the Workforce's Ability to Deliver Evidence-Based Interventions

- A workforce with knowledge about and competencies for implementing evidence-based interventions is essential to the successful scale-up of effective approaches.
- Providers of routine services for parents as well as services, such as treatments for mental illness and substance abuse, not designed specifically for parents but with the potential to benefit many parents, often lack knowledge and competencies in evidence-based parenting interventions.
- A viable way to increase the availability of evidence-based parenting interventions is to build on the commonality of specific and nonspecific elements across interventions.

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# Enhancing the Workforce's Ability to Deliver Evidence-Based Interventions

**Recommendation 3:** The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services should continue to promote the use of evidence-based parenting interventions. In so doing, it should support research designed to further operationalize the common elements of effective parenting interventions, and to compare the benefits of interventions based on the common elements of effective parenting programs with the specific evidence-based programs from which the elements originated.

These efforts also should encompass (1) development of a common terminology for describing common elements and training materials; (2) development of an open-source curriculum for use in educating health and human service professionals; and (3) creation of incentives and training programs to ensure knowledge of effective parenting interventions among professionals working with families.

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# Increasing Parents' Engagement in Programs and Services

- Parents' engagement in young children's learning is associated with improvements in children's literacy, behavior, and socioemotional well-being. Parent engagement is facilitated by provider skills in communication and joint decision making with diverse families about their children's education.
- Programs that prepare individuals to work with young children do not always include evidence-informed strategies for creating successful partnerships with families.
- Despite the availability of evidence-based approaches for increasing parent engagement, there is limited official guidance at the local, state, and federal levels on how to increase parent engagement as well as a lack of attention to how families' culture and language may moderate the effectiveness of engagement plans.

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# Increasing Parents' Engagement in Programs and Services

**Recommendation 4:** The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services and the U.S. Department of Education should convene a group of experts in teaching and research and representatives of relevant practice organizations and research associations to review and improve professional development for providers who work with families of young children across sectors (e.g., education, child welfare, health). Professional development should be evaluated as to whether its core elements include best practices in engagement of and joint decision making with parents.

**Recommendation 5:** The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services and the U.S. Department of Education should convene experts in parent engagement to create a toolbox of evidence-informed engagement and joint decision-making models, programs, and practices for implementation in early education settings.

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# Communicating Evidence-Based Parenting Information

- Although simply knowing about parenting practices that promote healthy child development does not necessarily translate into the use of such practices, awareness is foundational for behavior that supports children.
- When designed and executed carefully, public health campaigns are a potentially effective low-cost way to reach large and heterogeneous groups of parents. Moreover, information and communication technologies now offer promising opportunities to tailor information to the needs of parents based on their background and social circumstances.
- Inequalities exist in how parenting information is generated, manipulated, and distributed among social groups, as well as at the individual level in the ability to access and take advantage of the information.

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# Communicating Evidence-Based Parenting Information

**Recommendation 6:** The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services and the U.S. Department of Education, working with state and local departments of health and education and private partners, including businesses and employers, should lead an effort to expand and improve the communication to parents of up-to-date information on children's developmental milestones and parenting practices associated with healthy child development. This effort should place particular emphasis on informing parenting practices of underserved populations, such as immigrant families; linguistic, racial, and ethnic minorities; families in rural areas; parents of low socioeconomic status; and fathers.

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# Addressing Gaps in Research

- In addition to evidence-based interventions, a number of interventions have shown promise in supporting specific groups of parents but require further research to understand whether and how they should be scaled.
- To best guide policy and practice, it is important that such research focus on major gaps in current knowledge and use methodologies most likely to produce evidence that can inform policy or practice.

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# Addressing Gaps in Research

**Recommendation 7:** The secretary of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services and the secretary of the U.S. Department of Education should launch a national effort to address major gaps in the research-to-practice/practice-to-research pipeline related to parenting. This effort should be based on an assessment aimed at identifying the gaps in knowledge that if filled would most advance parenting-related policy and practice.

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# Addressing Gaps in Research

- Three areas in need of additional research are described in recommendations 8, 9, and 10, which are aimed at strengthening the evidence on
  - Interventions for parents with special needs (e.g., parents of children with developmental disabilities, parents with mental illness or substance abuse)
  - Interventions that engage fathers
  - Differences in parenting and engagement in interventions across diverse populations and family forms

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# Elements of Effective Interventions

- Viewing parents as equal partners in determining the types of services that would most benefit them and their children
- Tailoring interventions to meet the specific needs of families
- Integrating services and collaborating to support families with multiple service needs
- Creating opportunities for parents to receive support from peers to increase engagement, reduce stigma, and increase sense of connection to other parents with similar circumstances
- Addressing trauma, which affects a high percentage of individuals in some communities and can interfere with parenting and healthy child development
- Making programs culturally relevant to improve program effectiveness and participation across diverse families
- Enhancing efforts to involve fathers, who are underrepresented in parenting research

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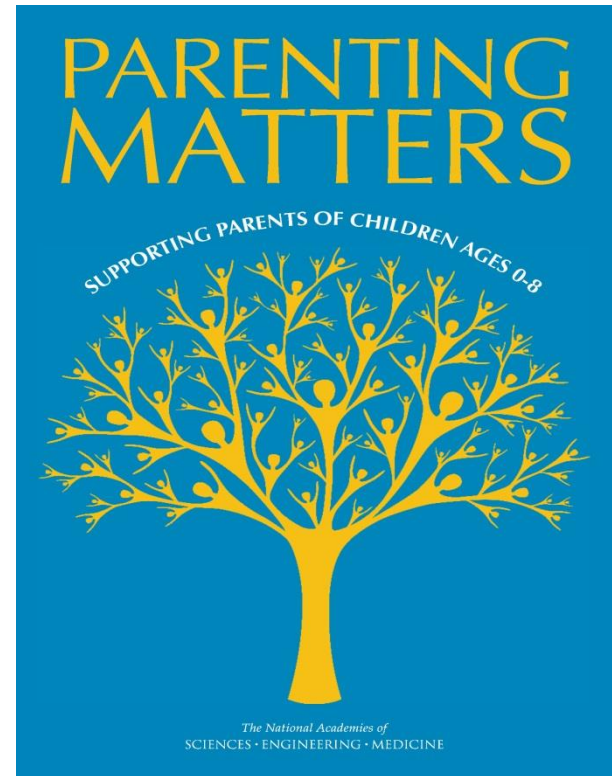
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## Supporting Parents of Children Ages 0-8

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