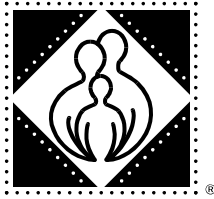


Healthy Families America: A Program That Works



Healthy Families America has been providing supportive home visiting services designed to strengthen families since 1992. What started as a pilot project with 25 sites has grown into a nationwide effort defined by three overarching goals: promoting positive parenting, improving child health and development, and preventing child abuse and neglect. Healthy Families America helps parents provide a safe and supportive home environment, gain a better understanding of their child's development, obtain access to health care and other supportive services, use positive forms of discipline, and nurture the bond with their child, reducing the risk factors linked to child maltreatment.

The flexible approach of this home visiting program enables communities and states to define their target populations according to their needs. Participants are a diverse group of parents facing a number of challenges. Most participants are single parents—many are teen mothers. Some live in relative isolation and have no social network to support them. Others struggle with substance abuse, mental illness, current or past family violence, unstable housing, joblessness and poverty. In spite of these obstacles, participants are making positive changes in their parenting practices. Results from a number of site and state-level evaluations conducted throughout the ten-year history of the program demonstrate the program's effectiveness.

⊙ **Promotes Positive Parenting Practices.**

Home visitors work with parents to build on their existing strengths and minimize potentially harmful behavior. They educate parents about interacting with their child, help them understand their child's capabilities at each developmental stage, and teach them positive forms of discipline. Home visitors help parents build a strong parent-child relationship and develop skills to increase their sensitivity and responsiveness towards their children.

⊙ **Improves Family Health.**

Families enrolled in the program are healthier and use medical services more appropriately than members of the general population, accessing preventive health care services and achieving higher immunization rates. Because these programs typically serve low-income families with multiple challenges, the program's ability to motivate parents to access timely well-baby care is impressive. Furthermore, participants are more likely to seek prenatal care, leading to fewer birth complications and low birth weight babies than individuals who did not receive services.

⊙ **Enhances School Readiness.**

Multiple factors contribute to a child being ready to benefit from school: basic health and nutrition,

proper stimulation, and an ability to listen and concentrate. An undetected developmental delay can limit a child's ability to learn. Children participating in Healthy Families America receive early developmental screenings and, if needed, are referred to appropriate services to address delays. Home visitors help new parents to provide children with experiences that stimulate healthy brain development and to develop strong, nurturing parent-child bonds, so that their children are more cognitively, emotionally, socially, and behaviorally ready to enter school.

⊙ **Increases Self-Sufficiency.**

The more stable the home environment, the stronger the foundation on which to raise a child. Healthy Families America programs have been effective in improving mothers' lives by facilitating their re-enrollment in school, making referrals for employment and housing, encouraging them to seek counseling for substance abuse and domestic violence. In addition, the program helps delay subsequent pregnancies. Mothers who are more successful in delaying subsequent pregnancies are generally in a better position to complete school, obtain employment, leave welfare and provide more positive child-rearing environments for their children.

Healthy Families America Works.

The program continues to expand as communities recognize the importance of providing parents with the information and skill-building opportunities they need to raise their children in a healthy, nurturing environment. Experience confirms that Healthy Families America is reducing child maltreatment and having a positive impact on families across the country.