

Current Trends in Child Abuse and Neglect in the United States

What Might Australians
Learn and Disregard
from this Evidence Base?

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for Child Protection

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Working together to enhance the lives of children

Introduction

The Australian Centre for Child Protection

- Conducts sound research to meet the needs of children and families at risk of maltreatment and/or out of home placement, and those who work with them.
- Provides knowledge and skills for workforce development with high risk communities
- Focuses these research and workforce development efforts on building and sharing the evidence base



Objectives for Today

- Review what we know based on research and demonstration projects in the United States
- Analyse what services and service components are provided and how effective they are in protecting children
- Place American evidence in the social and political context of that country, with implications for Australia's service system



A Brief Comment on Prevention

To measure prevention of harm:

- Look for signs of the absence of protection
- Child abuse notifications and/or removal of children

Effective education about child maltreatment will lead to earlier identification of maltreatment. Early intervention and prevention programs are working if abuse referrals and notifications rise (and then fall in future years).

Higher numbers of referrals and notifications are good IF the system has the capacity to serve those children once identified.

How can we truly ensure prevention programs are effective?

- A National Incidence Survey (NIS)



What Are Best Practices in US

This is the US evidence base about what program elements are predictive of or associated with:

- lower recurrence of maltreatment, or
- lower rates of out of home placement for children.

These are outcomes about which we have some confidence that we can measure them.

This evidence does not focus on prevention and service integration – much harder to measure and therefore gather evidence.



Effective Practice Components

- One-on-one learning and practicing of skills: parenting, social skills, negotiation
- Shared within a strong caring relationship
- Worker models these same skills in his or her interactions with others
- Praise, praise, praise
- Clear and concise information, not lengthy or complicated



The Importance of Engagement

The best predictor of good outcomes is engagement:

- Include staff that “look like” families, e.g., including community members in recruitment and delivery of services
- No judging or blaming parents or children
- Listen without turning against parents/children
- Be honest and encouraging even when the news is less than positive



More on Engagement

- Help with concrete needs, e.g. health care and financial support
- Work toward goals with the same sense of urgency as the family
- Provide support such as transportation, child care for meetings
- Have flexible funds for creative solutions
- Meet with families at their homes

And engagement is critical to a relationship aimed at learning and practicing new skills and information.



The Importance of Social and Cultural Context

Involvement in comparative international research on services to high risk families has amplified the importance of social, cultural and political context.

What does the family stop and the community begin?

Must consider context when attempting to replicate an evidence-based model in another setting.

The International Association of Outcome Based Evaluation and Research in Family and Children's Services, Padova, Italy





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