

# **Evaluating the Use of *Bright Futures* Educational Materials With Parents of Young Children with Special Needs**

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## **Background**

*Bright Futures* is a national health promotion initiative for children and families. One component of the program involves parent education, which includes a collection of handouts on various aspects of child development. The materials were developed to use with all families and children, but it is unclear if they are appropriate for parents of children with special needs because little is known about their use in this population. Parents of young children with special needs commonly receive information from their child's early intervention program; however, this information is typically specific to the child's particular special needs. In an attempt to utilize general parenting and child development materials, a local early intervention program recently distributed packets of *Bright Futures* handouts to parents. The packets were designed to provide parents with information to enhance parenting skills and improve overall child development.

## **Objective**

The objective of this study was to conduct a process evaluation of *Bright Futures* educational materials in a population of parents who have young children enrolled in an early intervention program. This evaluation focuses on four domains: general use of the handouts, opinions about content, relevance for parents of children with special needs, and barriers to use.

## **Methods**

This evaluation used a cross-sectional, mixed methods study design. Parents were asked to complete a mail-based survey including questions with multiple choice, open answer, and Likert-scale responses. Questions were designed to elicit information from each of the domains mentioned above in addition to demographics. A total of 105 families were eligible to participate in the survey.

## **Results**

Overall response rate to date is 37%. Although data analysis is still in initial phases, there are some preliminary results available. A majority of respondents (67%) indicated that they had read at least one of the handouts. The handouts that received the highest ratings were "Communicating with Children", "Special Time" and "Stimulating Environments". Handouts receiving lower ratings were "Self-Esteem" and "Infancy Family Tip Sheet". There were a variety of barriers to parents reading the handouts including lack of time, already having enough child development information, and feeling that the information was not applicable to their child. Subsequent data analyses will include comparisons of characteristics across groups of respondents.

## **Conclusions**

It appears that *Bright Futures* educational materials may be an effective health promotion tool for use with parents who have young children with special needs; however, handouts with information that is less specific to developmental stages may be more appropriate for this population.

## **Thesis Committee**

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