

Towards Flourishing for Parent Groups

Overview of the 2014 pilot study

Introduction and Background

Towards Flourishing (TF) officially began in January 2010. At the core of the TF Strategy is a Home Visiting Curriculum designed to introduce four topics of mental health and nine Everyday Strategies for mental health promotion in one-on-one conversations with parents. Since the development and roll-out of the HV curriculum within the Families First Home Visiting Program, many individuals and professionals, such as public health nurses and parent-group coordinators, have expressed their interest in introducing the topics and everyday strategies with groups of people, rather than solely in the one-on-one setting. In order to respond to this high demand, the TF team adapted the HV Curriculum so that the content would be suitable for group settings. As such, *TF Parent Group Facilitator's Guide* was created for delivery in groups that cater to mothers and fathers with babies or infants.

Evaluation

The *TF Parent Group Facilitator's Guide*, which covers the same four topics and nine everyday strategies as the original HV Curriculum, is divided into 4 sessions that are independent from one another and can be used at any point throughout the first year. In order to evaluate the usefulness and practicability of the Guide, four francophone perinatal support groups (1 in Winnipeg, 3 in rural areas) called *Centre de la petite enfance et de la famille (CPEF)* were selected for the pilot study. Each of the participating Group Facilitators (GFs) took part in the standard two-day Towards Flourishing Training and delivered the TF Parent Group Facilitator's Guide in their respective groups over four consecutive sessions.

Participants

- ◆ 17 mothers, 1 father
- ◆ 5 group facilitators, 1 provincial coordinator

Following the delivery of all four TF sessions,

Group Facilitators and the provincial coordinator took part in structured interviews in order to provide feedback. All parents who had been present in at least one of the four TF sessions were also invited to take part in focus groups to share their perspective on Towards Flourishing. Six interviews were conducted by phone and focus groups took place in each of the four participating sites.

Key Questions for Participants

- ◆ Talking about mental health (MH) with new parents: Is it acceptable? Is it important
- ◆ Talking about MH in group settings: Advantages and Disadvantages
- ◆ Do the TF Materials work well within parent-group context?

Results

1. Talking about mental health with new parents: Yes, it is very important to talk about mental health with parents!

Many participants mentioned that there is a notable shift in people's willingness to talk about mental health and wellbeing. In fact, group facilitators mentioned that parents were so engaged in the discussion topics introduced through the TF guide that conversations were rich and fruitful, and typically went on for more than an hour. Parents as well noted that they had been grateful to have the opportunity to openly share their experiences with other parents in the same life stage.

"It's just something, it's nice to see starting because it's something that should be the norm"
(Parent)

2. Talking about mental health in group settings: Yes, parent groups are an appropriate venue to discuss mental health because they...

- ◆ **Promote open sharing:** TF sessions offered an opportunity for parents to talk openly about topics that may not typically

- be raised in their daily lives.
- ♦ **Foster peer support:** The groups provide a safe place to share their experience and feel supported by others who may have a better understanding of what they are going through.
- ♦ **Help build social connections:** Some parents may not know many other people in the same stage of life. The groups are opportunity for them to make connections with other parents in their community. These connections are important for creating a sense of belonging and reducing isolation. Discussing the benefits of social connections during groups may even increase the likelihood that new friendships will be made.
- ♦ **Normalize postpartum experience and reduce stigma:** The groups give a chance for parents to see that they may not be the only ones experiencing challenges associated with having a new baby. Hearing other parents talk about their thoughts and feelings may reduce the fear of talking about certain things and may make it easier to reach out for support.

"...and yeah, it's nice when you get together. Especially, we have a fairly large group of moms and you find out, yeah, another mom went through this. And I know it's anecdotal, but often that is just as helpful." (Parent)

3. Delivery of TF within the Group

Context: TF was considered to be an excellent fit for parent support groups.

- ♦ Content: considered to be relevant and easy to understand
- ♦ Strength-based approach of TF was a good fit for the CPEF program.
- ♦ TF Topics: initiated rich conversations about parental mental health
- ♦ TF Topics: Validated what parents were already doing in their day-to-day lives that contribute to their overall wellbeing. This promoted a feeling of empowerment, and increased the likelihood that parents would continue engaging in positive everyday strategies.
- ♦ Everyday Strategies: were well liked by

participants.

- ♦ Some parents continued using some strategies weeks after the Pilot Study. One of the pilot sites now go for walks as a group with their babies before going inside as a result of TF
- ♦ Handouts: were useful to incorporate the strategies at home and also useful for the participants to share with their partners, children, and friends.
- ♦ Participants mentioned that the TF Strategy should be imbedded within the year round parent-group programs, and offered in other settings as well.

"What I loved about this program is the simplicity. So, that it's simple, that it's easy to understand, that it doesn't cost anything, that you don't need to leave the house, and that these are things you can easily do and that it might just take you 2 minutes, like the nasal breathing. So it doesn't take much energy (participant laughs) because sometimes new parents don't have any energy."
(Group Facilitator)

Conclusion

The pilot study revealed that the Towards Flourishing Parent-Group guide was indeed a useful tool for parent-group settings. According to participants, TF offered useful everyday strategies for mental health promotion, and presented an opportunity for parents to learn from one another on how to integrate these strategies into their busy lives. Furthermore, it was highlighted that TF helped to initiate group discussions on MH and provided an opportunity for parents to share their postpartum experience with others in the same life stage - an opportunity that may not present itself often, or ever in some cases. Overall, Group Facilitators and parents spoke highly of the program, and were eager to continue using the guide in their professional and personal lives.

"I want to add that I think it's important to have groups that talk about mental health because otherwise we don't really have the chance to talk about those subjects with friends or family; even if you would feel comfortable, it's not necessarily a topic that is brought up." (Parent)