

Long Term Impact: The Science That Supports Our Work

Nurturing Parenting

Nurturing is the driving force behind everything we do at FNC. Today, scientific consensus confirms the importance of [consistent, nurturing and responsive parenting](#) for short-term child well-being and future success in kindergarten, school and life.¹ Nurturing parenting creates a secure attachment between child and parent, which enables autonomy and security in new situations. It also has a direct positive effect on children's capacity to self-regulate (control their emotions, actions and bodies) and on their social and cognitive development.^{1,2} These social-emotional skills are crucial for success in kindergarten, school and beyond.^{2,3,4}

[Neglectful, abusive, and unhealthy relationships](#) are at the opposite end of the nurturing continuum. Child abuse and neglect have an immediate impact on child well-being and far-reaching [consequences into adulthood](#). Maltreated children develop insecure attachment to their caregivers, poor social skills, fall behind in emotional and cognitive development required for school achievement, and are at risk for higher incidences of mental health and behavioral problems in infancy and adulthood.^{5,6} Child abuse and neglect are sources of [toxic stress](#) for children – stress that disrupts early brain development, resulting in stress-related diseases and cognitive impairment.⁷

The [Nurturing Parenting Program](#) was designed as an intervention for parents at risk of, or with a record of, child neglect or abuse. Across more than 30 years of evidence, pre-post studies show consistent attitudinal improvements among parents and significantly lower rates of recidivism (return to abuse or neglect) of under 10%, vs. rates between 25% and 47% among parents with no intervention.⁸ Nurturing Program evaluations have also shown high levels of completion among participants (70% and more), a significantly higher rate than research on other programs implemented in child welfare systems.⁸ A recent large-scale evaluation confirmed the importance of higher program participation in Nurturing Programs. Parents with higher levels of attendance had more positive outcomes than those with lower attendance.⁹

Enhancing Early Cognitive and Social Skills

Helping parents be their children's first teachers is woven throughout our work with families. Parents bolster children's early cognitive and social development [through frequent high quality learning interactions](#) — reading, talking, and playing together. FNC's strategy includes both home-based and group-based models to increase these positive interactions between parents and their young children.

The richness of content in parent-child interactions builds on responsive and nurturing parenting and is key for early cognitive development.¹⁶ Studies show that low-income families are less likely to be able to provide rich home learning environments due to economic constraints and their own lower educational attainment.^{17,18}

Ensuring School Readiness

Experimental and quasi-experimental evaluations of the Parent-Child Home Program (PCHP) (a national home visiting model) have shown that program completion increases kindergarten readiness prevalence by 50%, delivers significantly higher math, reading and language scores by third grade, reduces the need for special education by 65% and increases high school graduation rates by 30%.¹⁹

Our Parent-Child Playgroup model follows similar methodology, and builds on emerging evidence of supported playgroups' positive impacts for child development.²⁰ Programs like PCHP, Parent-Child Playgroups and Welcome Baby visits are vital supports in helping close the achievement gap for the families we serve in Bowdoin-Geneva and other low-income neighborhoods of Boston, and in all communities across the Commonwealth.

Community-Centered Approach

own lives, incidents of violence, substance abuse and mental illness in the family or household make nurturing parenting a challenging task,¹⁰ one that is further complicated by complex child-rearing relationships (grandparenting,¹¹ non-custodial fatherhood¹²). These family factors are compounded if parents are socially isolated or their social connections are not supportive.¹³ Supportive social connections and parents' own ability to nurture have been shown to mediate the impact of these community stressors.¹⁴

A community-centered approach recognizes and addresses the [family and social determinants of nurturing parenting](#). Parents' ability to nurture and protect their children is supported by increased opportunities for [nurturing relationships with other adults](#) in and outside the family, increased access to [social support networks](#) and to [concrete resources in time of need](#).¹⁰ Evidence from parenting education programs also underscores that a support structure alongside the educational element is vital, providing long-term engagement and creation of supportive friendships and networks. Family Nurturing Center's work to connect families to each other and to resources (our own and through referrals) is an integral part of our theory of social change and permeates all our programming.

Further, a community-based approach is necessary in order to [prevent](#) child maltreatment and [minimize the disruptive impact of these stressors](#) for children. For this purpose, our main office houses one of four Patch programs in the state, which blends community engagement with the expertise of state child welfare workers. This collaboration with the Department of Children & Families enhances our preventive reach, supports families more effectively and quickly, prevents unnecessary placements (in state custody) and increases the share of children placed with kin.¹⁵

Increasing access to effective parenting education and practices is [a crucial element of the work of moving people out of poverty](#). This is the broad consensus among academic researchers, practitioners and community leaders.²¹ Family Nurturing Center's model exemplifies the best of these sustainable and effective practices.

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