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# A Straightforward Approach to Surveying Parents for Measuring and Improving Program Practices

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## Purpose

- Describe the foundations for and key elements of the ECD Evaluation Project Parent Survey
- Describe and illustrate several ways of analyzing and interpreting Parent Survey results
- Illustrate how parent survey findings can be used to target improvements in program practices
- Illustrate how parent survey findings can be used to demonstrate program benefits for funders and other constituents

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## Background

- Measuring and evaluating early childhood and family resource program effectiveness have been a focus of my research and practice for more than 30 years
- One focus of this work has been the assessment of adherence to family support principles and family-centered practices and the relationships between adherence measures and parent, child, and family outcomes
- My colleagues and I have completed more than 50 studies investigating the relationships among program practices and different types of participant outcomes

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# The Relationship Between Family Support Principles and Family-Centered Practices

**Principles**



**Practices**



**Indicators**

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# TrAAAVING the TransCanada Highway

## Mapping the Adoption, Application and Adherence to Family Support Principles

by Carl J. Dunst

### ▼ Abstract

It is often said that Family Resource Programs are unique, not only because of the services they provide, but also because of the principles that guide them. In this article, Carl Dunst tries to identify the hallmarks of an organization that has moved beyond paying lip service to its chosen principles. Dunst offers a number of good strategies for working with your staff and volunteers to develop a shared understanding of the values and ideas that make up your principles. He also emphasizes the importance of talking concretely about the way your principles "look" in practice, and suggests ways you can use your principles consciously in day-to-day activities like program planning and supervision of staff. Ultimately, a truly principle-driven organization must be willing to let its efforts be judged by the families it serves. Dunst underscores the importance of seeking out honest and credible feedback, and having the humility to listen to it when it comes.

### ▼ Résumé

On dit souvent que les programmes de ressources pour la famille sont uniques, non seulement par les services qu'ils offrent, mais aussi par les principes qui les guident. Dans cet article, Carl Dunst s'attache à cerner les empreintes d'une organisation qui est allée au-delà de l'éloge stérile des principes qu'elle a choisis. L'auteur propose des stratégies qui aideront à développer, auprès de votre personnel et vos bénévoles, une vision commune des valeurs et des idées qui composent vos principes. Il insiste sur l'importance de parler concrètement de ce que « donnent » ces principes en pratique et suggère des moyens de les utiliser consciemment dans des activités courantes comme la planification de programme et la supervision de personnel. Un organisme véritablement guidé par ses principes doit être prêt à ce que ses efforts soient jugés par les familles qu'il dessert. L'auteur souligne la nécessité de rechercher des commentaires honnêtes et crédibles et d'avoir l'humilité de les écouter le moment venu.

This paper was prepared for the FRP Canada National Biennial Conference "Emerging Trends in Family Support: From Policy to Practice," Mississauga, Ontario, October 2002. The paper is an extended version of a newsletter article appearing in *Working Strategies* published by the California Statewide Strategies Program, Department of Social Services, Office of Child Abuse Prevention.

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Available from FRP Canada, Resources, *Perspectives in Family Support*, 2004, Vol. 1, 41-48.

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## Family Support Principles

- Family support principles are belief statements about how supports and resources ought to be made available to parents and other family members involved in early childhood intervention, parenting support, and family resource programs.
- Family support principles are value statements that specify how staff ought to interact with and treat families.

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# Family, Infant and Preschool Program Guiding Principles

- Families and family members are treated with dignity and respect at all times.
- Staff are sensitive, knowledgeable, and responsive to family, cultural, ethnic, and socio-economic diversity.
- Family choice and decision-making occur at all levels of participation in the program.
- Information necessary for families to make informed choices is shared in a sensitive, complete, and unbiased manner.
- Practices are based on family-identified desires, priorities, and preferences.
- Staff provide supports, resources, and services to families in a flexible, responsive, and individualized manner.
- A broad range of informal, community, and formal supports and resources are used for achieving family-identified outcomes.
- Staff build on child, parent and family strengths, assets, and interests as the primary way of strengthening family functioning.
- Staff-family relationships are characterized by partnerships and collaboration based on mutual trust, respect, and problem solving.
- Staff use help giving practices that support and strengthen family functioning.

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## Main Focus of Capacity-Building Family-Centered Practices

Capacity-building family-centered practices include methods and procedures used by practitioners to create participatory opportunities and experiences to strengthen existing and promote the development of new parenting and family abilities in a manner that enhances and strengthens competence and self-efficacy beliefs



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## Family-Centered Practices

Research consistently has found that there are two clearly discernible subsets of family-centered practices that “fall into” distinct categories:

- **Relational Practices**
- **Participatory Practices**

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## Relational Family-Centered Practices

- Relational practices include behavior typically associated with effective help giving practices, including, but not limited to, compassion, active and reflective listening, empathy, and effective communication.
- Relational practices also include practitioner beliefs and attitudes about family and cultural strengths, values, and attitudes, and practitioner sensitivity to these beliefs and values as part of intervention practices.

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## Participatory Family-Centered Practices

- Participatory practices include behavior that actively involves family members in (a) informed choice and decision making, and (b) using existing strengths and abilities as well as developing new capabilities needed to obtain family-identified resources, supports, and services.
- Participatory practices also include practitioner responsiveness to and flexibility in how help is provided to children and their families.

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## From Family Support Principles to Family-Centered Practices to Program Evaluation and Improvement

1. Adopting family support principles as guiding program beliefs
2. Developing and identifying family-centered practice indicators for family support principles and using them as standards against which everyday program practices are measured
3. Measuring and monitoring adherence to family-centered practices and the relationships between adherence and participant outcomes

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## Family and Parent Surveys and Scales

- Parenting Experiences Scale
- ECD Evaluation Project Parent Survey

## Evaluating Family-Based Practices:

# Parenting Experiences Scale

Carol M. Trivette, Ph.D.,  
and Carl J. Dunst, Ph.D.,  
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Comments from parents such as, "It's nice to work with someone who understands how complicated *my* life is"; "I know when I make a decision about my child, my home visitor will respect it"; "Now, I feel like I can help my child learn"; and "I enjoy being with my child so much" are great to hear. These types of comments let early interventionists know they are using family-centered practices that result in supporting and enhancing parents' feelings of competence and confidence. And while comments like these are certainly gratifying, early intervention programs still must assess parents' perceptions systematically in order to determine whether such sentiments are occurring for all families in the program or for only a few. The *Parenting Experiences Scale* (Trivette & Dunst, 2003) described in this article allows program administrators to quickly assess parents' perceptions of experiences regarding family-centered practices and of their own parenting competence, confidence, and enjoyment. In addition to describing this scale, this article provides information about why it is important to assess program practices and how a program might use this scale to gather information from families. Further, it provides two examples of how program directors and staff could use the information gathered to improve program practices.



Program evaluation is an important activity in high quality early childhood programs (Harbin & Salisbury, 2000). However, deciding *what* to assess and *how* to assess it are questions that programs sometimes find difficult to answer. Two concepts that are important for early intervention programs to assess are family-centered practices and parenting competence. Both the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA, 1997) and the *DEC Recommended Practices in Early Intervention/Early Childhood Special Education* (Sandall, McLean, & Smith, 2000) specify that one desired outcome of early intervention is that parents of children receiving early intervention services perceive themselves as capable of supporting their children's growth and development. Specifically, DEC's

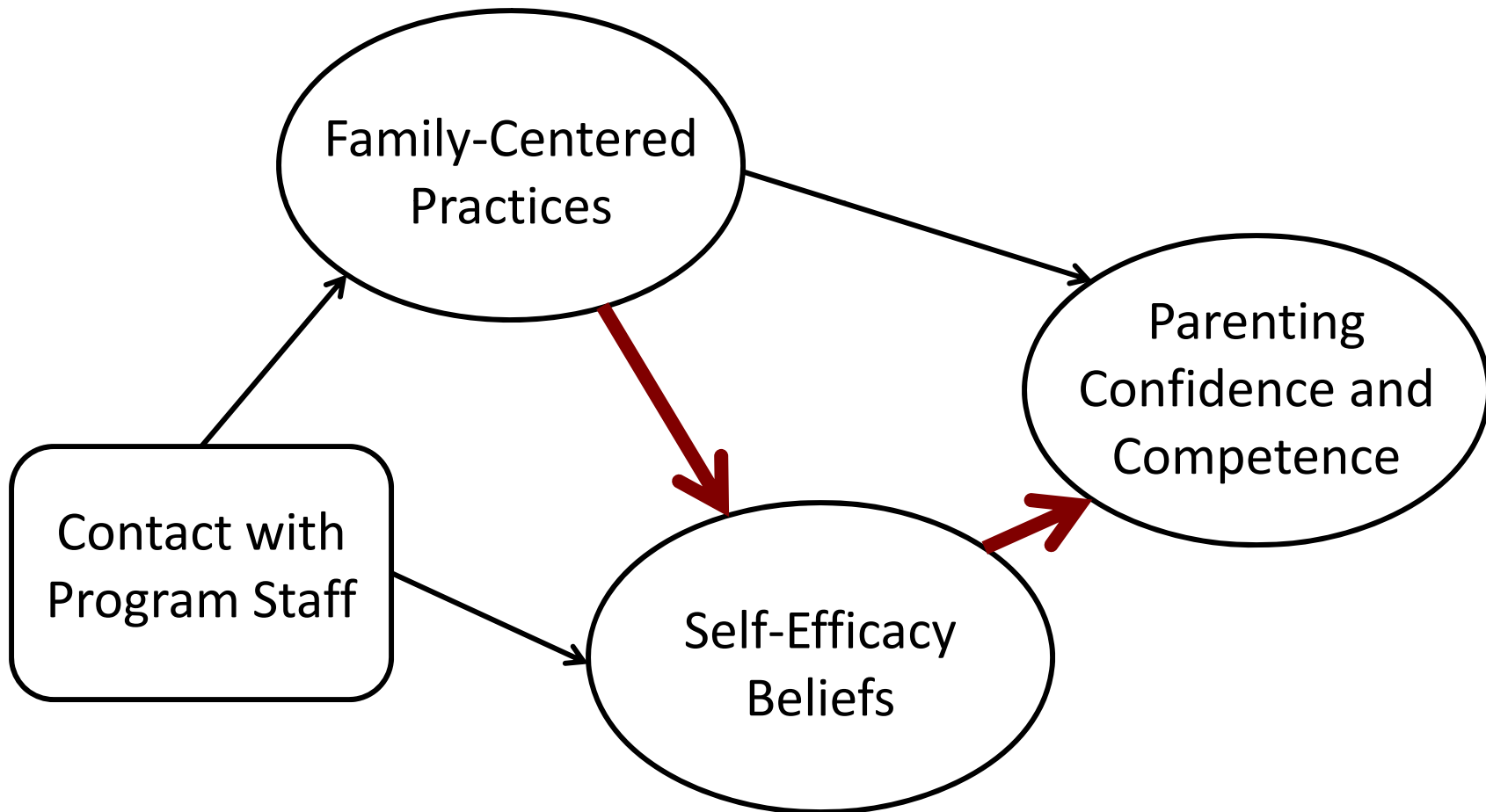
*Young Exceptional Children*, 2004, Vol. 7, No. 3, 12-19.

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## Parenting Experiences Scale Elements

- Contact with program staff
- Family-centered practices
- Parenting confidence and competence
- Self-efficacy beliefs

# Relationships Among the Parenting Experiences Scale Elements





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## ECD Evaluation Project Parent Survey

- Contact with program staff
- Family-centered practices
- Program participant satisfaction
- Parent supports
- Parenting capabilities
- Self-efficacy beliefs

## Contact with Program Staff

1. About how many times have you attended this program?							
Not At All	1 – 2 Times	3 – 4 Times	5 – 6 Times	7 – 8 Times	9 – 10 Times	11 – 12 Times	More Than 12 Times
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
2. About how many times has your child (or have your children) attended this program?							
Not At All	1 – 2 Times	3 – 4 Times	5 – 6 Times	7 – 8 Times	9 – 10 Times	11 – 12 Times	More Than 12 Times
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

## Family-Centered Practices

3. Thinking about all your contacts with the program staff, please indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree with the following statements.

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
a. I am treated with dignity and respect	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
b. I get valuable information that helps me make good parenting decisions	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
c. Staff say positive things about how I parent my children	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
d. Staff respond to my concerns	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
e. Staff respect my personal and cultural beliefs	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
f. Staff point out things my child(ren) does well	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
g. Staff help me learn how to get resources I need for my child(ren)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

# Program Participant Satisfaction and Support

4. Thinking about all your overall experience with the program, please indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree with the following statements.

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
h. This program has had a positive influence on my parenting	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
i. This program has had a positive influence on my child(ren)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
j. I have made new connections with other parents	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
k. I get together with parents I met in the program in my home, in their homes, or in the community	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

## Parenting Capabilities

5. Parents often have different feelings and thoughts about being a parent. Please indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree with the following statements.

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
l. I have fun with my children	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
m. I feel good about myself as a parent	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
n. I provide my child(ren) with activities that help them learn	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
o. I enjoy doing things with my child(ren)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
p. I feel I am doing the right things as a parent	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
q. I feel I am the best parent I can be	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

## Self-Efficacy Beliefs

6. Thinking about your involvement in the program, how much influence do you believe you can have in terms of getting the information and supports you want from the program?

No Influence At All						Influence About Half the Time						Influence All the Time
0	10	20	30	40	50	60	70	80	90	100		

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## What Can Be Learned From the Parent Survey?

- How well program staff are using family-centered practices (adherence)
- How variations in staffs' use of family-centered practices are related to differences in personal control beliefs and parenting capabilities
- Evaluating the pathways through which family-centered practices are related to child, parent, and family functioning

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## Measuring Adherence to Family-Centered Practices

- Adherence to family-centered practices is measured in terms of program participant judgments of the extent to which program staff interact with and treat participants and their families in ways consistent with the intent of family-centered practices.
- Adherence judgments are based on the assumption that only program participants are in a position to determine how they are treated.



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## Measuring Adherence to Family-Centered Practices

- In an adherence study or survey, program participants are asked to indicate on a 5-point scale ranging from *never* to *all-the-time* the extent to which staff treat or interact with the respondent and his or her family members in the ways indicated.
- A typical survey includes 5 or 6 relational indicators and 5 or 6 participatory indicators.

## Family-Centered Practices Indicator Scale

<b><i>TELL US ABOUT YOUR EXPERIENCE WITH PROGRAM STAFF</i></b>					
Staff sometimes differ in how they interact with and treat children and their families. Please indicate how our program staff interacts with and treats you.	Never	Very Little	Some of the Time	Most of the Time	All the Time
Really listen to my concerns or requests	1	2	3	4	5
See my child and family in a positive, healthy way	1	2	3	4	5
Provide me information I need to make good choices	1	2	3	4	5
Are responsive to my requests for advice or assistance	1	2	3	4	5
Try hard to understand my child and family's situation	1	2	3	4	5
Recognize my child and family's strengths	1	2	3	4	5
Help me be an active part of getting desired resources	1	2	3	4	5
Are flexible when my family's situation changes	1	2	3	4	5
Encourage me to get what I want for myself	1	2	3	4	5
Are sensitive to my personal beliefs	1	2	3	4	5
Support me when I make a decision	1	2	3	4	5
Recognize the good things I do as a parent	1	2	3	4	5

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## Criterion for Measuring Adherence to Family-Centered Practices

Percentage of indicators receiving the highest rating on a 5-point scale indicating that a respondent and his or her family are ***always*** treated in a way consistent with the family-centered scale indicators

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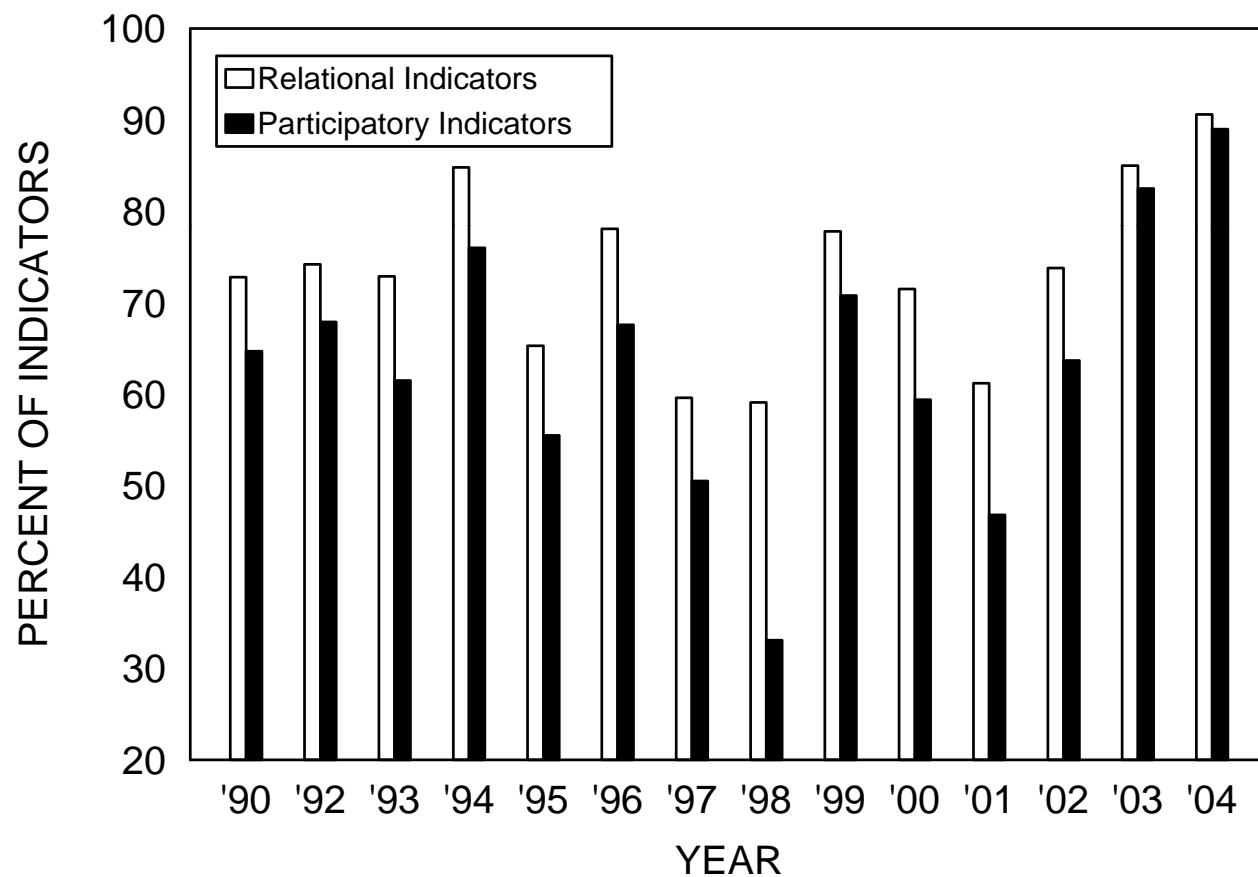
## Sources of Information for Measuring Adherence to Family-Centered Practices

- Eighteen (18) studies conducted between 1990 and 2004 at the Family, Infant and Preschool Program (Morganton, NC, USA)
- One thousand ninety-six (1,096) program participants
- Thirteen thousand five hundred eleven (13,511) indicators

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Dunst, C.J., & Trivette, C.M. (2005). *Measuring and evaluating family support program quality*. Winterberry Press Monograph Series. Asheville, NC: Winterberry Press.

## Degree of Adherence to Relational and Participatory Family-Centered Practices



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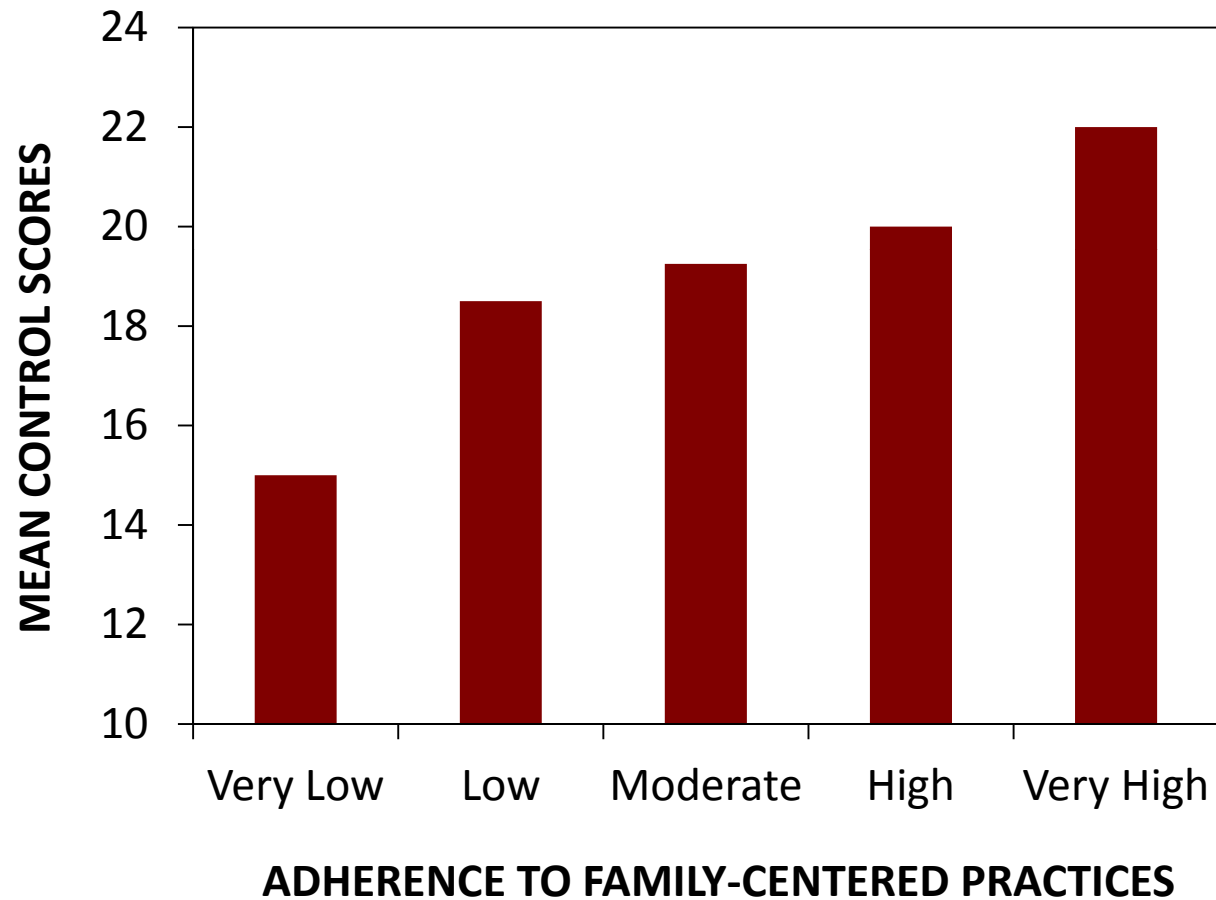
## Relationship Between Adherence to Family-Centered Practices and Parents' Personal Control Appraisals

- In this type of analysis, program participants are grouped into different subgroups along a continuum from very low to very high adherence to family-centered principles and practices
- Differences in adherence are related to differences in parents' judgment of the perceived control over program practices

## Example of a Personal Control Appraisal Scale

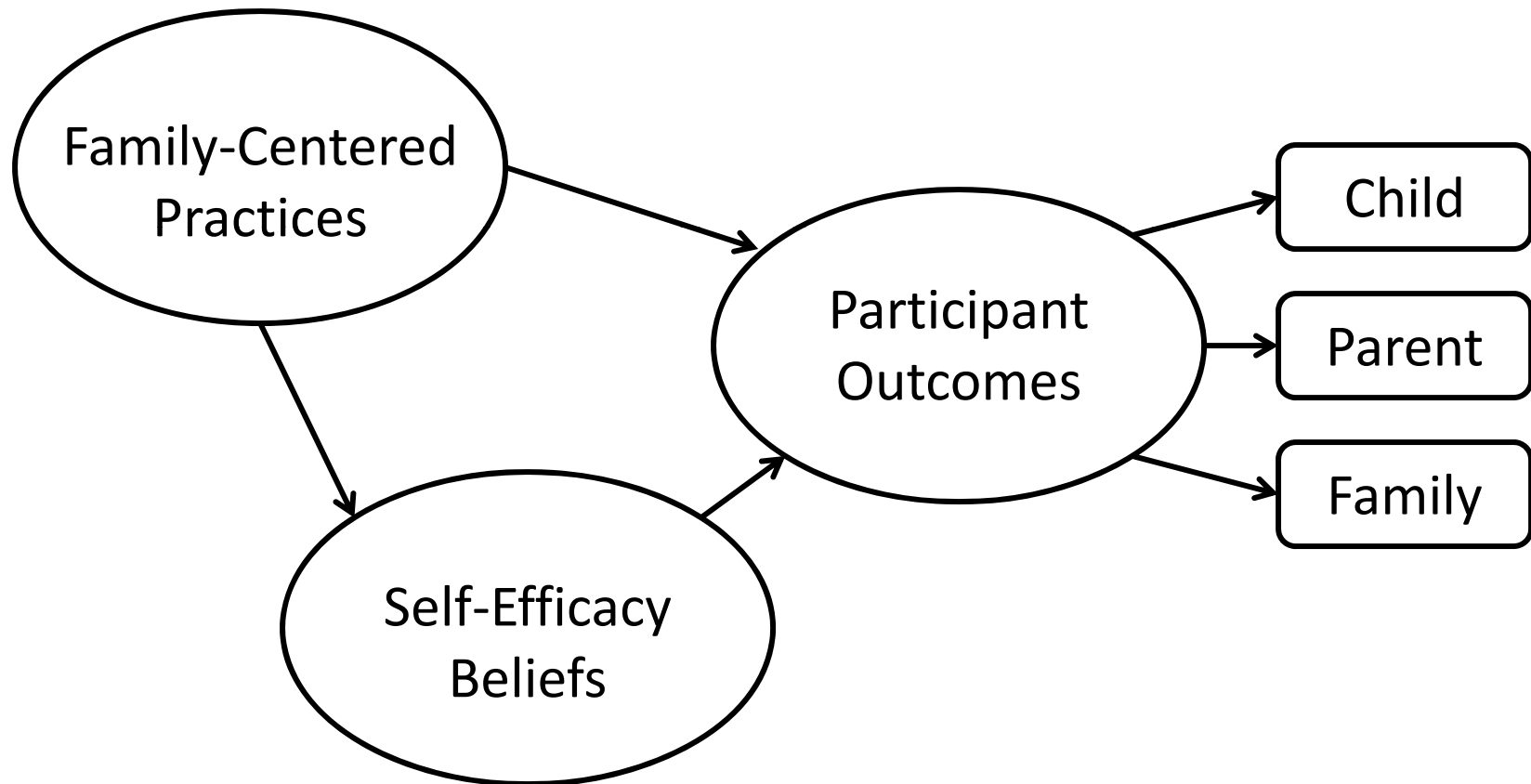
How much control do you have in terms of your involvement in the Family, Infant and Preschool Program?	None	Very Little	Sometimes	Usually	Always
Who works with your child and family	0	1	2	3	4
How often staff work with your child and family	0	1	2	3	4
Where supports and resources are provided	0	1	2	3	4
When staff work with your child and family	0	1	2	3	4
How staff work with your child and family	0	1	2	3	4
What types of supports and resources are offered or provided to your family	0	1	2	3	4

## Relationship Between Adherence to Family Support Principles and the Personal Control Appraisals of Program Participants

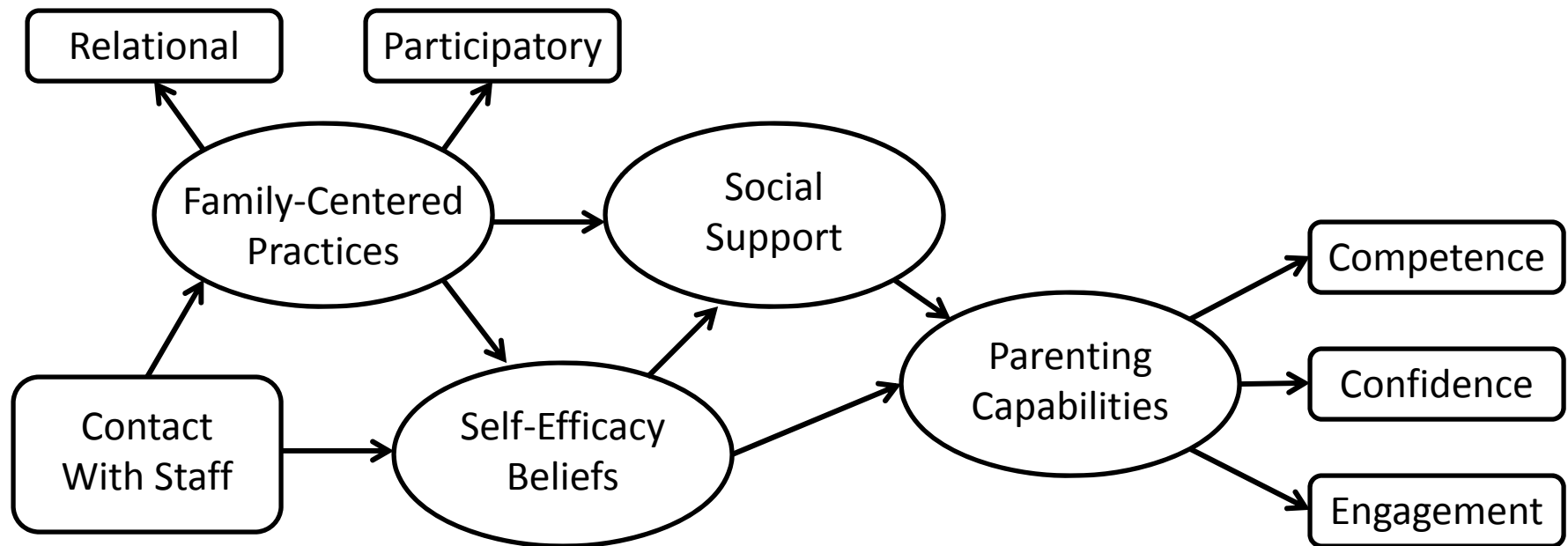




## Pathways of Influence of Family-Centered Practices on Child, Parent, and Family Outcomes



## Hypothesized Relationships Among the Parent Survey Indicators Based on Research Findings from Other Studies



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## Targeting Program Improvements

- Overall adherence information can be used to identify which practices are consistent or inconsistent with family-centered indicators
- Individual family-centered indicators (e.g., relational vs. participatory practices) can be examined to determine where changes or improvements need to be made
- Between program components (e.g., home-based vs. center-based) can be compared to identify variations in the use of family-centered practices

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## Reporting Adherence Information to Funders

- Report adherence information in ways that match funder expectations in terms of expected or desired outcomes
- Emphasize the fact that patterns of results are much the same as those found in research studies
- Illustrate how adherence information was used as a fidelity measure and how you used the information for program modification and improvement

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## Conclusions

- The Parent Survey is a useful tool for evaluation and program planning and improvement purposes
- The survey content is based on more than 100 studies demonstrating empirical and functional relationships between the survey components
- Programs that routinely collect Parent Survey information are in a better position to justify staff practices and parent benefits



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Available at

<http://utilization.info/presentations.php>