

Title: LESSONS LEARNED FROM JUNTOS Y SALUDABLES PEER-LED PARENT EDUCATION

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Purpose: The objective of this study was to assess the quality of training received by peer educators in the Juntos y Saludables (Get Healthy Together) program. Juntos y Saludables is a multi-component childhood obesity prevention program for Head Start.

Method: This study applied the peer led education approach to provide parents with education regarding healthy growth among their children. Seven parents were recruited through teachers, other parents, and the Parent Leadership Institute at a local Head Start center. Faculty and graduate assistants from local universities provided training to the parent educators in both English and Spanish. Training sessions were conducted the week of each new parent education session, with one booster training after spring break (7 training sessions in total). The parent educators were trained to: (1) encourage the Head Start parents to participate in the sessions, (2) explain the health messages, and (3) answer any questions the parents had. A focus group was conducted at the end of the program, with all seven parent educators, to assess their feedback about the training they received. **Results:** The peer parent educators reported that they became educators to improve children's health. They were satisfied with the training methods and felt that they learned a lot of information regarding nutrition and physical activity recommendations for their children. They also reported feeling comfortable delivering health information to other parents. Parent educators appreciated that they could work together (e.g., in bilingual pairs) to provide the health education to parents in both English and Spanish. The peer parent education training session attendance was high-71% and greater. **Conclusions:** Most peer parent educators felt comfortable and confident delivering the material as the program progressed. Earlier training might assist the parent educators to have greater familiarity with content prior to the first session. Educators also created strategies to deal with situations that arose during the sessions (e.g. crowd control, parents requesting extra bags). Future training can include suggested strategies to handle similar situations.

Keywords: obesity prevention, peer-led education, parent education