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Families at Five: Extending Land-Grant Research Findings to Families

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Families at Five: Extending Land-Grant Research Findings to Families

Abstract

Families at Five is a joint community outreach partnership between Colorado State University (CSU) Department of Human Development and Family Studies and CSU Cooperative Extension. The program provides research-based family life education and resources to families, Extension educators, and family life community professionals. Comprised of an adult program with accompanying programs for adolescents and children, Families at Five is designed to educate family members on ways to strengthen family relationships. Included in the article are suggestions for engaging Cooperative Extension agents and other community practitioners in the program planning and delivery of educational programs.

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Introduction

Families at Five is a community outreach partnership by Colorado State University (CSU) Department of Human Development and Family Studies and CSU Cooperative Extension to extend land-grant research findings to families. The primary goals of Families at Five are to educate adults and children on how to strengthen family relationships and to enhance the university's public

mission of making life-long learning part of its core mission by providing greater access and partnerships in education (Kellogg Commission, 2001). This article provides an overview of the Families at Five program.

Program Overview

Designed to disseminate science-based, practical information on building strong families (Mahoney, Kaiser, Girolametti, MacDonald, Robinson, Safford, & Spiker, 1999), Families at Five includes both an adult seminar series and accompanying program for children. The adult program, which meets at 5 p.m. to accommodate employed families, includes free, monthly, 1-hour seminars on important topics, (e.g., balancing family and work, building strong marriages, and coping with divorce). A professional expert facilitates each seminar and provides practical strategies based on current research. An accompanying children's program (ages 3-11) engages children in fun, meaningful, and age-appropriate activities on corresponding topics. Often families leaving the seminar are observed to continue talking about what they learned.

In order to extend the program's outreach, the Families at Five seminars are videotaped for Extension agents and other family life professionals to rent or purchase for use later. A leader's guide and accompanying activities are included.

Audience

The audience of Families at Five is diverse. Participants are community members from various backgrounds who seek information, support, and creative ideas to integrate into their personal and professional lives. Families at Five participants include single and coupled parents, grandparents, and professionals who work with children, adolescents, adults, couples, and families, e.g., therapists, childcare providers, professors, teachers, and scout leaders. Young adult university students participate as part of their education and personal and career development. Children come with diverse backgrounds, developmental abilities, and experiences. Many times families, individuals, and professionals attend several sessions over a semester. Families at Five has reached over 2,000 adults and hundreds of children.

Research-Based Information Encourages Critical Consumers

Families at Five seminars attempt to address some of the top priority needs that Coloradans have for research-based information on strengthening families and marriages (Fetsch & Yang, 2004; Weigel, Fetsch, Jenson, Yang, & Rogers, 1992). Including children, adolescents, and parents in separate, concurrent enrichment programs can reinforce program effectiveness and enhance family cohesion and communication (Hurd, Lerner, & Barton, 1999). Families at Five strives to destigmatize therapeutic services and build bridges between participant families and community services (Green, 1998; McGoldrick, Giordano, & Pearce, 1996).

Marketing

Families at Five is advertised to the community in various ways. Families at Five posters and flyers are distributed through most schools and childcare facilities in the community. Churches, therapists, and physicians are asked to display and distribute flyers. A newspaper article summarizing key points of the upcoming presentation is featured during the week prior to the presentation.

Funding

CSU Cooperative Extension, CSU, local foundations, and local businesses support Families at Five. Faculty members and students volunteer their time and expertise.

Evaluation

Families at Five seminars are evaluated for their helpfulness/usefulness, relevance, and interest level. A summary across sessions revealed that the Families at Five participants found (1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree) the seminars helpful and useful (4.25), relevant (4.43), and interesting (4.31). The most effective method of marketing the program was by school flyers, newspapers articles, and by word of mouth by community professionals and community members. Future research is needed to further evaluate this program to determine how much participating families' strengths are increased.

Further Plans

Future plans for Families at Five are evolving to meet the needs of an ever-growing population. An undergraduate course was developed based on videos and supplementary information. Students read and discussed current research articles on the contemporary topics in the videotapes and wrote papers on each topic. This course is currently being formatted into an on-line distance-learning course.

Conclusion

One of the most important and often unmet needs of families is for reliable, relevant information on topics that strengthen family relationships. Cooperative Extension and Resident Instruction family scholars and practitioners are well equipped to provide workshops to the public, because they have access to current family research, have been trained to disseminate information in a holistic and developmentally appropriate manner, and have access to large numbers of families.

Family education programs strengthen communities by serving the needs of diverse families and by providing information on community services. The Families at Five model can be a useful outreach model for other Cooperative Extension and university and community partnerships to extend land-grant research findings that strengthen family relationships.

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