



Assessing the Effects of Families for Safe Dates, a Family-Based Teen Dating Violence Abuse Prevention Program

Foshee, V., McNaughton Reyes, H., Ennett, S., Cance, J., Mauman, K., Bowling, J. (2012). *Journal of Adolescent Health, 54* (1), 349-356.

Often when we think about teen dating abuse prevention programs, we think of programs delivered in a school setting. Moreover, we may even think specifically of the curriculum *Safe Dates*, as it is one of the only evidence-based teen dating abuse prevention curricula. However, the *Families for Safe Dates* program combined components of the *Safe Dates* curriculum with additional activities and presents them in a very new format: at home, with parents and teens working together. This program is one of the first family-based teen dating abuse prevention programs to be evaluated.

In the research article by Foshee et. al, *Families for Safe Dates* is examined to determine the effectiveness of the program. The researchers selected a sample of families through a nationwide telephone process. Eligible families were required to speak English and have at least one child between the ages of 13 and 15. There were a total of 324 families that completed the materials; divided into treatment and control groups.

Families for Safe Dates (FSD) takes a family-based approach due to a wealth of research showing the importance in caregivers' roles in preventing teen dating abuse. Research has shown families impact risk factors for teen dating abuse and long-term effectiveness, and help prevent other teen health risk behaviors. Conducting teen dating abuse prevention within the family setting is practical as families shape the creation of values. It is also a valuable approach as it promotes prevention on the relationship level of the social ecological model. Additional research into parental involvement in teen dating violence prevention has shown that parents typically do not talk to their teens about this, primarily because they do not know how to have those conversations. This added to the need to implement and evaluate the *FSD* program.

When creating the *FSD* program, consideration was given to what has been found in other parent focused programming. Common barriers to parent participation have been found to be a requirement to attend sessions out in the community, the cost of attending a program, and

the time required. The *FSD* program attempted to reduce these barriers by conducting all of the sessions through a self-administered format at home. Families were sent a series of six booklets a few weeks apart. The first book is just for parents and the following five are to be completed by the parent and the teen. Trained health educators called families after each booklet was delivered to encourage completion, offer guidance, answer questions, and collect feedback. The health educators also conducted phone interviews three months after all the booklets had been completed to gather more data about how the information has been used and any impacts during that time.

The self-administered approach to the *FSD* program is based on promising evidence from another similarly structured family-based program, which sought to reduce teen alcohol and drug behaviors. These researchers compared the effects of the program with self-administered and group-administered families and found the self-administered groups were more effective in decreasing associated risk factors.

The researchers sought to evaluate two components of the *FSD* program: (1) factors that prepare and encourage parents to become engaged in teen abuse prevention, (2) risk factors associated with teen dating abuse.

To conceptualize the evaluation of parent engagement, the researchers used the Protection Motivation Theory. This model helps us understand the conditions that should be met in order to motivate “change agents” to act in the way we want. For this research project, the change agents are parents and the goal is to get them to become active in teen abuse prevention efforts. Applying the theory here simply means we want parents to believe the following:

Protection Motivation Theory applied to a family-based teen dating abuse prevention approach

Perceived susceptibility	Teen dating abuse is a real problem and my teen is vulnerable to it too
Perceived severity	There are real, negative consequences to teen dating abuse that could happen to my teen
Response efficacy	As a parent I have the ability to influence my teen in respect to teen dating abuse
Self-efficacy	I have the knowledge and skills to talk to my teen about teen dating abuse

The *FSD* program was intentional in their design of the program so it would be consistent with their theoretical framework and meet all of the desired outcomes. Each of the six booklets are mapped out in the research article (see page 3) to identify the goal and which constructs are being targeted in that session. This is very useful, as it identifies which concepts were missed if a booklet is not completed and can help add context to those evaluation results. Below is a summary of the primary outcomes for both of the research goals.

Desired outcomes related to parent engagement:

- Improve parent communication skills with their teens
- Increase parent knowledge of teen dating abuse
- Decrease parent acceptance of teen dating abuse
- Increase belief in importance of being involved with teen dating abuse

Desired outcomes related to risk factors for teen dating abuse:

- Decrease in teen acceptance of dating abuse
- Increase in teen perception of the negative consequences of dating abuse
- Improve teen skills in resolving conflicts
- Increase parent rule setting and monitoring

The researchers had a good response rate from their sample; 69% of families completed all of the booklets and 88% completed between one and five of the booklets. The researchers found there was a significant increase in three of the four conditions described in the Protection Motivation Theory. The *FSD* program was effective at increasing parents' perceived severity, response efficacy, and self-efficacy. For the desired outcomes related to parent engagement, it was found that all four of these outcomes increased or decreased as hypothesized. However, the outcomes related to risk factors for teen dating abuse were not as favorable. The only outcome with significance was a decrease in teen acceptance of dating abuse. It was also noted that the program had an effect on the onset of dating abuse victimization. During the course of the program, 3% of the teens in the treatment group and 11% of the teens in the control group became the victim of physical dating abuse.

In summary, the *FSD* program was found to be effective at improving family discussions about teen dating abuse, decreasing teen acceptance of dating violence, and preventing dating abuse victimization.

Suggested uses:

- Consider this research when designing prevention programs. There is value in building skills with teens but also much value in building skills of parents.
- Utilize the Protection Motivation Theory when considering how and why people are motivated to change behaviors. This can be used in other social change projects, not just limited to programs about dating violence.
- The report described the success with self-administered prevention programs for families and teens. This may be useful when there are obstacles to programming in the schools as it eliminates this barrier by providing an alternative to school-based programming.
- The report highlighted that a large barrier for parents getting involved is they do not know what to say or how to say it. Consider creating talking points that will prepare parents to have these conversations.