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Evaluation of Family Skills Group at Fernbrook Family Center

Jessica Robertson

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Agency: Fernbrook Family Center

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Purpose

This project evaluated the Parenting Piece by Piece curriculum. This project sought to gain feedback on the ways the agency can improve family skills groups to better meet the needs of the client population Fernbrook Family Center serves. Parenting Piece by Piece is an eight-week program teaching parents new parenting skills.

Statement of Problem

- The program exists to help parents with mental health diagnoses or who have a child with mental health diagnoses learn new parenting skills.
- The program addresses how “to recognize your own strengths, cope with stress, listen and communicate with your children, better understand the development of their child, deal with misbehavior, find resources, parent from a distance, attachment, styles of discipline, and conflict management (Myers-Walls, Newcome, & Berkopes, 2009, pg.1).”
- Children with mental health diagnoses or who have parents with a diagnosis often experience stress that affects their biopsychosocial development (Pretis & Dimova, 2008).

Literature Review

- Children in the child welfare system can experience adverse effects of having parents with a mental health diagnosis, including a “perception of helplessness in the situation, becoming disorientated, feeling guilt about their parent’s situation, fearfulness, separation anxiety, extreme concern about their parent, and have a tendency to take on the parenting role (Pretis & Dimova, 2008, pg. 154).”
- Parenting skills groups can help parents balance the demand of parenting and their mental health symptoms.
- Parenting groups lead to learning new parenting skills, provide a safe place to practice the new skills, and provide a venue to share parenting experiences with other parents.

Methodology

The approaches that were used in this research study were a survey and an interview. The survey asked questions about fidelity and outcomes of the family skills group. The surveys were conducted with past participants of the family skills group. Interviews were conducted with the facilitators of the family skills group. For both methods, a convenience sample was selected. Surveys were analyzed using descriptive analysis and interviews analyzed through content analysis.

Response Rate

- 4 out of 7 participants returned completed surveys for a response rate of 57%.
- 3 out of 3 facilitators completed the interview process for a response rate of 100%.

Key Findings

Facilitator Responses (n = 3)

Implementation

Strengths	Suggestions for Improvement
Able to chose the sections clients would best understand	Different cognitive levels sometimes made delivering the curriculum difficult
Gave clients opportunity to have input on what they wanted to learn	Role plays need to be added
Able to bring outside material to supplement the curriculum (activities, crafts, and books)	Children need to be more involved in the group

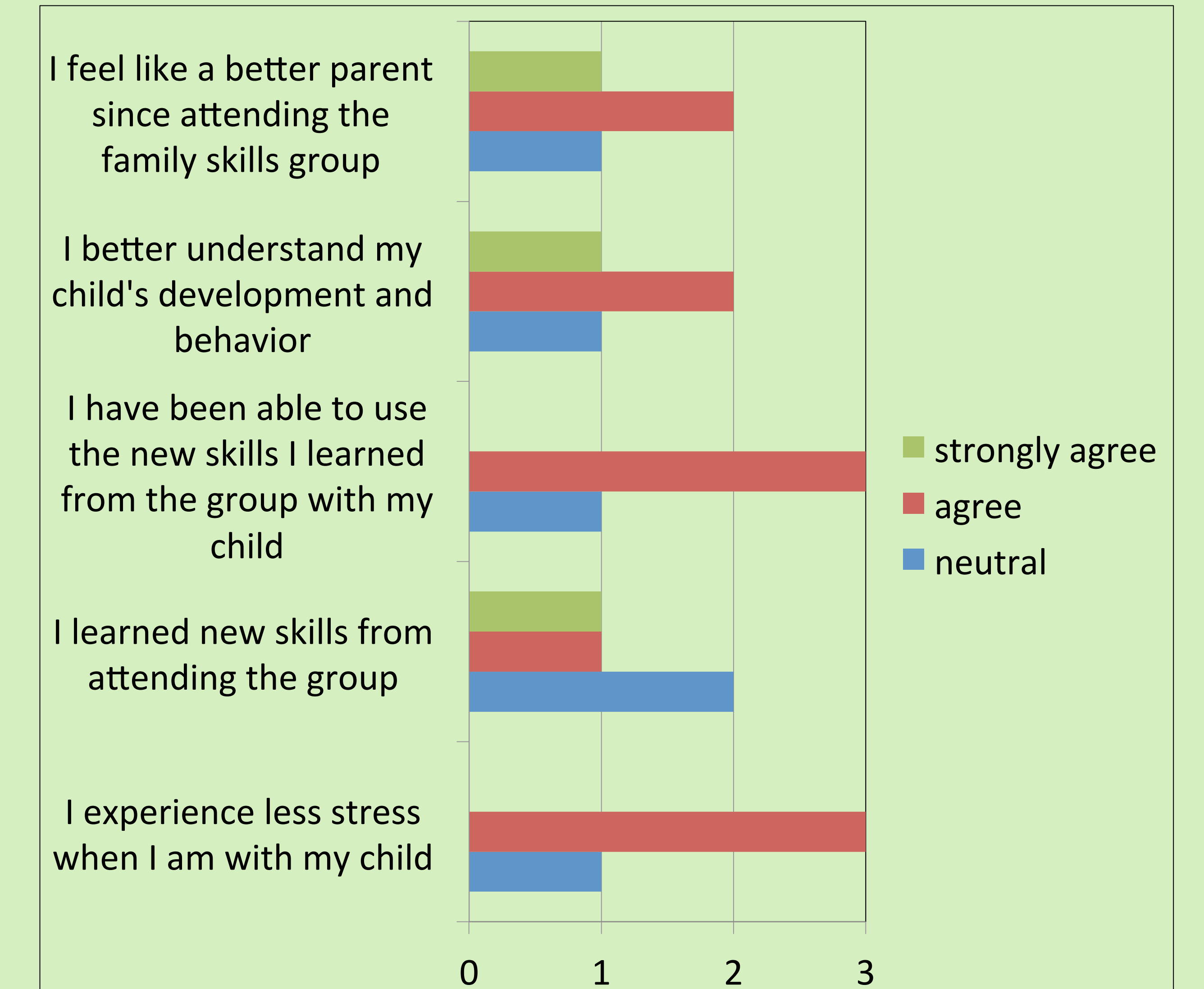
Structure

Strengths	Suggestions for Improvement
Curriculum was cost-effective	Need to develop consistency of attendees
Flexible structure	Explore incentive model
Two facilitators	Need more hands on activities
Consistent facilitators	Different structure for the group may be more effective
Closed group	Times for group could be different to gain different client populations
Meal provided to the group	Need more families attending
One individual to do play time with the children	Have different groups for families with different aged children so that participants can better relate to one another

Participant Responses (n = 4)

Number of group sessions attended	Number of participants responses
1-2 sessions	2
5-6 sessions	1
7-8 sessions	1

Participant Responses (n = 4)



Discussion

The participants of the family skills group were not consistent in their attendance. Half of the participants attended only 1-2 sessions. The family skills group is designed to by eight sessions long. Attending 1-2 sessions may not be enough time to gain and practice new parenting skills. It is possible the participants learned new skills from the group. However, all of the participants of the family skills group also receive individual adult mental health services from Fernbrook Family center that work on skills with the participant. Some of the participants also have a family skills worker working with their family on skills. This raises the question of where the participant truly acquired the parenting skills.

Recommendations

- Have more child involvement in the group sessions.
- Give participants more hands-on opportunities in group.
- Develop marketing technique to draw families to attend.
- Develop an incentive program to increase attendance.
- Apply for a grant to make the group free of charge for all participants.

References available on request