Use of a Stages of Change Model to Guide Evaluation Development

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Introduction

Phase II of the CYFAR Project, *Beginning Education Early: Strengthening Rural Alabama Families* (BEE), is being implemented in three Alabama counties through the Alabama Extension System county offices. The goals for Phase II of the BEE project are to increase parental capacity to (1) initiate contact and interact productively with community services related to children's health; and (2) develop effective co-parenting relationships across a variety of family forms and structures. Health and relationship learning modules were developed to meet these two goals. Once these modules were developed, the next step was to determine how to accurately evaluate the impact of these programs.

Effective evaluation of community-based programs, such as the BEE project, is imperative to their long-term sustainability. Utilizing evaluation materials that effectively document program impact from pre-program to post-program participation is challenging when the goals of the program are centered on behavioral change. Since the Stages of Change Model by Prochaska deals with measuring behavioral changes, it was utilized to guide the development of the evaluation materials for this phase of the project. The evaluative advantage that we see to utilizing the Stages of Change Model is that it mirrors the actual process of change that participants should go through based upon exposure to program materials, thereby capturing *movement towards behavioral change.*

The Stages of Change Model

The Stages of Change Model assesses change in behaviors by capturing movement towards change through its stages. (While the original purpose of the model was to assess behavioral change, we also adapted it for use in assessing change in awareness.) In this model, the term 'stage' refers both to the occurrence of change, as well as motivational readiness. The Stages of Change Model consists of five stages:

- **Precontemplation:** No thought of changing.
- **Contemplation:** Convinced of need to change, but has not taken action.
- **Preparation:** Intending to take action soon.
- **Action:** Changes recently made.
- **Maintenance:** Changes in place for extended period of time. (www.prochange.com)

Table 1: Response Options Based on Stages

Stages of Change	Precontemplation	Contemplation	Preparation	Action	Maintenance
Behavior Response Options	**A** I have not thought about this.	**B** I have thought about this, but that's all.	**C** I want to do (or make) this happen.	**D** I have started doing this.	**E** I do this on a regular basis.
Awareness Response Options	**A** I have not thought about this.	**B** I have thought about this, but that's all.	**C** I want to keep this in mind.	**D** I have started keeping this in mind.	**E** I keep this in mind on a regular basis.

Development of the Evaluation Tool

Evaluation tools were developed to measure the progression of change in both behaviors and awareness in terms of the five stages of the Stages of Change Model.

- A 5 point Likert scale was developed with each response option representing one of the five stages (see Table 1).
- 7 to 10 behavior and awareness objectives were identified for each module of the health and relationship learning programs, respectively (see Table 2).
- The accomplishment of each objective is measured according to the 5 point Likert scale that we developed based on the stages.

Table 2: Examples of Behavior and Awareness Objectives

		Behavior Objectives	Awareness Objectives
Relationship Modules	*Module 1: Family Connections*	My family spends quality time together.	My family has its own strengths.
	Module 3: Relationships Skills—Managing Conflict	I deal with conflict, rather than avoid it.	How we say something leads to more conflict than what we say.
Health Literacy Modules	*Module 1: Staying Healthy*	My pre-school children do not eat fried foods or fast foods.	Doctor visits are for staying healthy, not just for treating sickness.
	Module 3: Preparing for a Health Care Visit	I arrive on time for health care appointments.	My child's health care provider can help us with emotional or behavioral problems.

Evaluation Procedure

Participants are evaluated at three different points in time in order to determine not only whether there is a pre/post test difference, but also the processes that participants go through in relation to the materials.

- Participants initially complete a pretest that includes questions covering all modules for either the health literacy or relationship program to which they will be exposed.
- After completing each individual module, participants complete a post-test evaluation just for that specific module.
- Within one year of completion of the health or relationship series, the participants complete a post-test that covers the entire series.