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The Parents Matter! Program (PMP): Effectiveness of a family-based sexual risk prevention program

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Background: 19% of African-American youth initiate sexual intercourse before age 13 years. Youth need to receive sexual risk prevention information and skills prior to onset of risk behaviors; parents may provide a viable mode for delivery.

Methods: A randomized clinical trial was conducted to evaluate the effectiveness of an intervention designed to provide parents with information and skills to effectively communicate with their pre-adolescent children. 1128 African-American families with a 9-to 12-year-old child were assigned to 1 of 3 intervention arms in a community-based trial: *enhanced skills building communication* 5 sessions focusing on communication about sexuality education and sexual risk reduction; *brief skills building communication* a single condensed session covering the same content as the enhanced intervention; and *general health (control)* a single session focusing on general health issues. Outcome measures included parent and child report of parent-child communication about sexual education topics, parent and child report of knowledge, comfort, skill and confidence of parents communicating about sexuality (responsiveness), and child report of intention to initiate intercourse in the next year (classified as delayer or anticipator). Assessments occurred at pre-intervention, post-intervention, 6-and 12-month follow-up.

Results: Relative to *controls*, the *enhanced group* had higher levels of parent-reported sexual communication ($p<.01$) and parent-reported responsiveness ($p<.01$) at all assessments following intervention. The *enhanced* and *controls* also differed on child-reported sexual communication ($p<.01$) at post-intervention, and child-reported responsiveness ($p<.05$) at post-intervention and 6-month follow-up, but not at 12-month follow-up. Relative to *controls*, a smaller percentage of children of parents in the *enhanced* intervention reported being anticipators at 12-month follow-up (5% vs. 12%, $p<.05$). The *brief* intervention group was not different from the *controls* following intervention.

Conclusions: Family-based prevention programs can help promote sexual communication between parents and pre-adolescent children and is associated with reduced sexual intentions, the primary predictor of initiation of sexual intercourse.