

ACT Raising Safe Kids Program

Introduction

The *ACT Raising Safe Kids Program* is one of a few evidence-informed violence prevention initiatives focusing on early childhood. It is based on research indicating that in the early years, violence, abuse, and neglect are mostly perpetrated by children's own parents. Studies have also demonstrated that exposure to abuse and neglect early in life has long-term serious emotional, cognitive, and behavioral trauma and consequences for children and youth. Therefore, ACT was designed to focus on the early years and on the important role of parents and caregivers in shaping children's early environment and experiences.

The program was developed by the American Psychological Association (APA) Violence Prevention Office in 2000 and revised in 2005. It is a socio-cognitive and psycho-educational intervention that mobilizes and educates groups of parents and caregivers of children from birth to 8 years old to be effective positive parents and create safe and healthy environments that protect children and youth from violence and abuse and its long term consequences.

Program Description

The program goal is to strengthen families and improve or change parenting skills and practices that prevent child maltreatment. The program achieves its goals by (1) *establishing partnerships with a variety of organizations and agencies* and (2) *by training professionals to take the program to families and caregivers in their communities*.

ACT places considerable emphasis on the importance of cultural competence when working with diverse communities. The program is culturally sensitive and designed to increase the professionals' sensitivity to cultural differences.

ACT is universal in its approach and is for all parents and caregivers regardless their risk related to child maltreatment. The research-based curriculum is delivered by trained ACT Facilitators in 16 hours, in eight, two-hour sessions – on average – and has the following modules:

1. Understanding Children's Behaviors
2. Young Children's Exposure to Violence
3. Understanding and Controlling Parents' Anger
4. Understanding and Helping Angry Children
5. Children and Electronic Media
6. Discipline and Parenting Styles
7. Discipline for Positive Behaviors
8. Parents as Teachers, Protectors and Advocates at Home and in the Community

The program materials are available in English and Spanish, Portuguese and Japanese, they are organized in a kit that includes the ACT Facilitator Manual, Parents' Handbook, two brochures, Evaluation Guide and Instruments, Children's Activities Guide, Motivational Interviewing Manual, ACT Attendance Card, and the ACT TV PSA DVD.

Program Implementation and Evaluation

Implementation Model

The program is implemented by a variety of host organizations and agencies and delivered by their staff trained as ACT Facilitators. Since 2008, five ACT Regional Training Centers have been established to promote the program in their regions and organize workshops to train groups of ACT Facilitators to conduct the 8-week program. The ACT Centers are: **ACT Midwest RC** located in the Chicago area; **ACT Great Lakes RC** located at the University of Toledo/ College of Medicine, Toledo, OH; **ACT Northeast RC** located at the Brandeis University Lemberg Children's Centers in the Boston area; **ACT Southeast RC** located at the Melissa Institute for Violence Prevention and Treatment in Miami; **ACT Western RC** for CA, AZ, NE, WA. The ACT national staff provides technical assistance to the regional training centers and sites through e-mails, conference calls, annual leadership seminar, a listserv, and web-based seminars.

The strength of the ACT Program is related to (1) its ability to be administered to groups of parents and caregivers from *all backgrounds* regardless of their level of risk in an efficient and cost-effective manner, (2) flexibility to be hosted by a variety of institutions and be integrated into existing interventions and services for parents, and (3) its potential for being implemented in diverse settings. The ACT program is currently implemented in 70 communities in the U.S and in Colombia, Peru, Puerto Rico, Greece, and Brazil and soon in Japan. Organizations that host and implement the program include community-based social service and mental health providers, colleges and universities, local government agencies, local coalitions, churches, hospitals. Parents in general, teen parents, incarcerated parents, grandparents, abused women are recruited to attend the 8-week program.

Evaluation

Evaluation studies conducted and have demonstrated that ACT is a promising evidence-informed program demonstrating that parents:

- Enjoy the interactive and participatory classes, learn and use violence prevention and parenting skills at home.
- Consider the program as non judgmental and an excellent opportunity to help them be better parents.
- Are changing their parenting practices, they are less violent toward their children, and children are less aggressive.
- Reduce the use of harsh verbal and physical discipline.
- Increase their nurturing behavior, control of parental anger, acknowledgement of developmentally appropriate behaviors for children.

For additional information go to www.actagainstviolence.org