



Best Practices in Parenting Education and the Introduction of the "Families in Transition" Course

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National Center for State Courts
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Take-home Points

- **There is great variability in how children fare after separation/divorce. Unremitting conflict can have a deleterious impact on mental health.**
- **Parent education programs can be powerful agents of protection.**
- **Using evidence-based parent education programs ensures best use of resources and upholds the credibility of the court.**
- **A rigorous evaluation of the Families in Transition (FIT) program has demonstrated promising results.**



**Child
Adjustment
after
Separation and
Divorce**



considerable variability

based on
risk and protective factors



small but
consistent
gap in
adjustment

high prevalence
of divorce
(In U.S. ~
1 million / yr)

**most children are
resilient!**

Children's exposure to interparental conflict (IPC) confers risk for mental health and related problems.



Post-divorce IPC is the most well-documented risk factor for children who experience parental divorce.

IPC often changes over time.

It diminishes for many

families, but

continues or even increases

in a sizeable subgroup.



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Coping in context: The long-term relations between interparental conflict and coping on the development of child psychopathology following parental divorce

Karey L. O'Hara, Irwin N. Sandler, Sharlene A. Wolchik, Jenn-Yun Tein
REACH Institute, Arizona State University

Abstract

Exposure to high levels of post-divorce interparental conflict is a well-documented risk factor for the development of psychopathology and there is strong evidence of a subpopulation of families in which conflict persists for many years after divorce. However, existing studies have not elucidated differential trajectories of conflict within families over time, nor have they assessed the risk posed by conflict trajectories for development of psychopathology or evaluated potential protective effects of children's coping to mitigate such risk. We used growth mixture modeling to identify longitudinal trajectories of child-reported conflict over a period of six to eight years following divorce in a sample of 240 children. We related the trajectories to children's mental health problems, substance use, and risky sexual behaviors and assessed how children's coping prospectively predicted psychopathology in the different conflict trajectories. We identified three distinct trajectories of conflict; youth in two high conflict trajectories showed deleterious effects on measures of psychopathology at baseline and the six-year follow-up. We found both main effects of coping and coping by conflict trajectory interaction effects in predicting problem outcomes at the six-year follow-up. The study supports the notion that improving youth's general capacity to cope adaptively is a potentially modifiable protective factor for all children facing parental divorce and that children in families with high levels of post-divorce conflict are a particularly appropriate group to target for coping-focused preventive interventions.

Karey L. O'Hara, Sharlene A. Wolchik

Late

ARTICLE

Effectiveness

parenting

in

**high-quality
parenting is a
robust protective
factor**

and Quality: Parenting Quality and

Family Following

Divorce

WOLCHIK, SHARLENE WOLCHIK,
WINSLOW, NICOLE E. MAHRER,
O'HARA, KAREY L., and DAVID WEINSTOCK ■

Promoting the well-being and best interests of children in
court professionals and prevention scientists who develop
development, evaluation, and implementation of two progra
tion for separated/divorcing parents, and the Family Transi
flict separated/divorcing parents to attend the NBP. The di
long-standing collaboration with Maricopa Family Court. V
lying small theories, and the evaluation of their effects in re
ily court and ways that the court promoted the developmen

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<https://doi.org/10.1080/10502556.2018.1454200>

Does Shared Parenting Help Children in High-Conflict Divorced Families?

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B. Winslow |

6): . doi:10.1037/a0034449.

Associations of Parenting Quality, Interparental Conflict, and Overnights with Mental Health Problems of Children in Divorced Families with High Legal Conflict

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¹Arizona State University

²Nebraska Center for Research on Children, Youth, Families & Schools, University of
Lincoln

ABSTRACT

Despite a recent shift in the allocation of parenting time
arrangements following divorce, there is no clear consensus
regarding the effects of shared parenting on children's adjust-
ment in high-conflict families. We propose key questions and
methodological options to increase the ability of results from
well-designed empirical studies to inform practice and policy.

KEYWORDS

Fathers; interparental
conflict; parenting quality;
parenting time; shared
parenting; youth adjustment

to be
point of view.
Evidence l'evie
material l'obiec
court,
proof o

**The Promise of
Evidence-
based
Programs**





"Evidence-Based"

If the court adopts an evidence-based program...it should:

- be able to tell the public what outcomes it can expect.
- uphold the credibility of the court.
- be assured that it is a good use of resources to accomplish a goal that it values.



WHAT DO WE MEAN BY EVIDENCE-BASED?

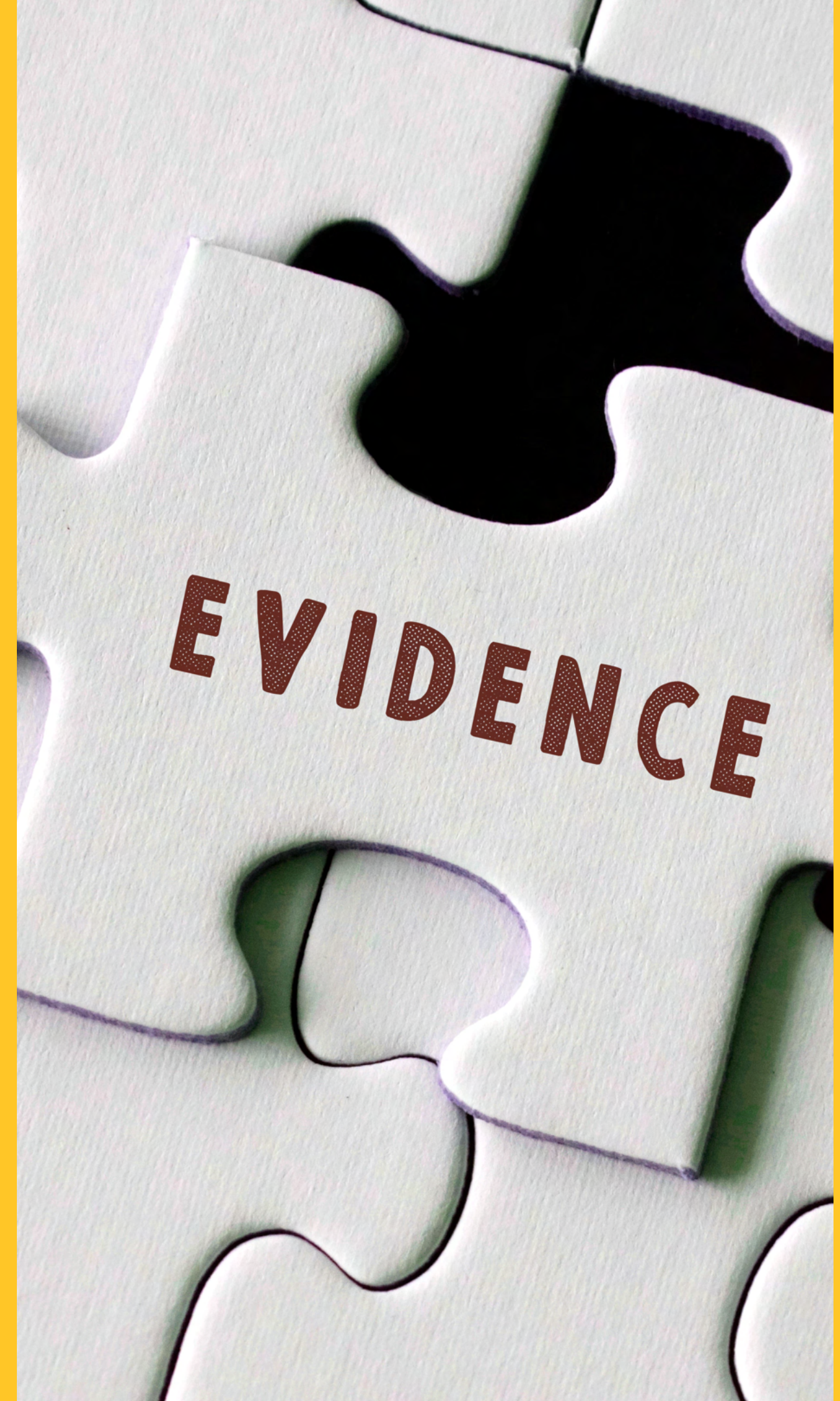
research linking the goals of parent
education programs and its
observed outcomes

EVIDENCE OF WHAT?

being specific about the outcomes measured
clarifies what evidence means

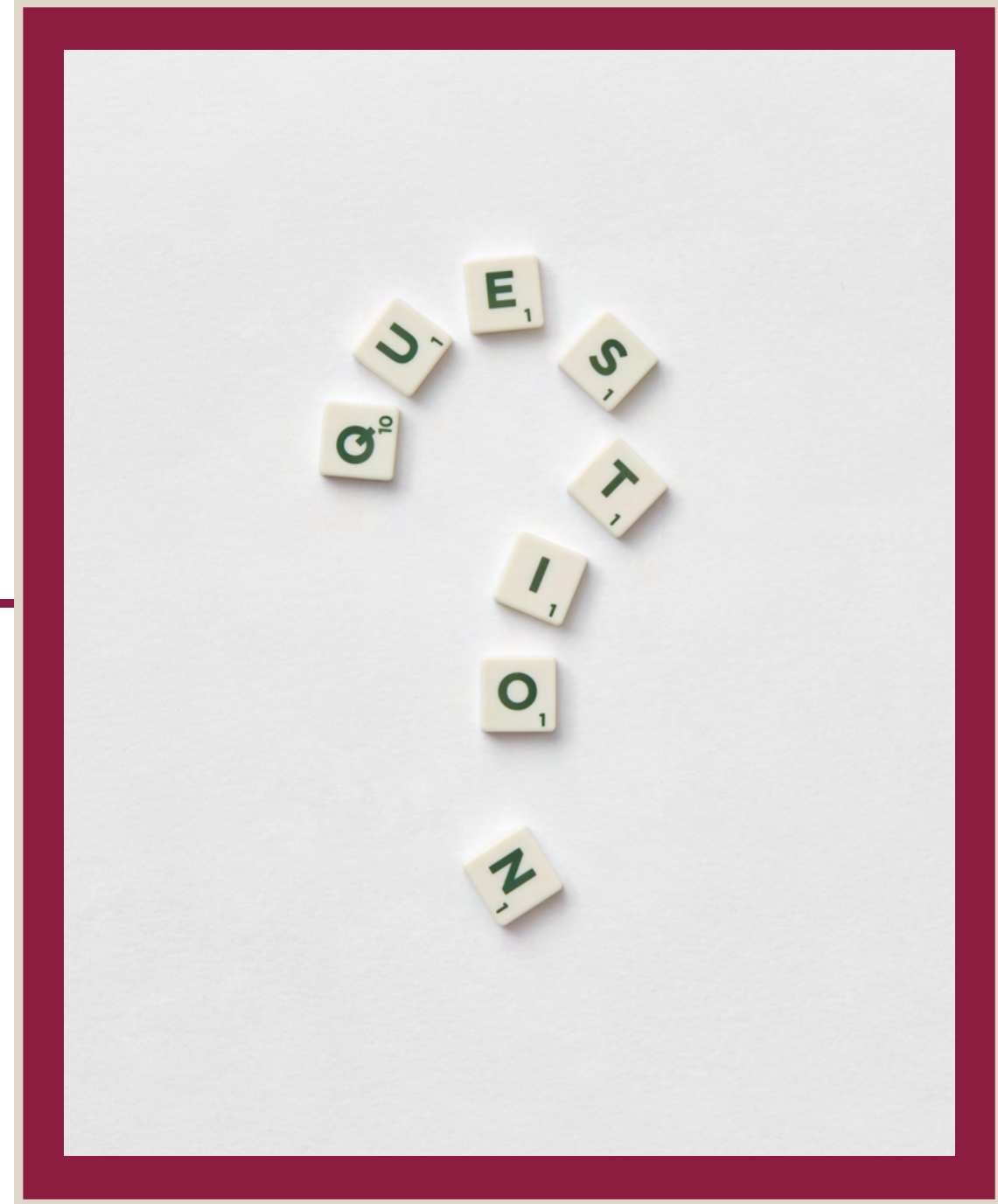
LEVELS OF EVIDENCE

the level of evidence corresponds to the research
methods used to gather the data





**evidence
of what?**





- Every program has a goal either explicit or implicit.
- Claims of evidence refer to confidence that it is achieving that goal.
- One benefit of refining our use of the term evidence is that it forces the professional to clarify the goal they are claiming.



evidence of what

potential goals of parent education programs

- Provide practical information.
- Increase public awareness of issues that protect or harm children.
- Improve public use of the court and reach agreements.
- Create behavior change.
- Protect and promote the well-being of children.
- Promote effective and efficient legal process of separation/divorce cases.





levels of evidence



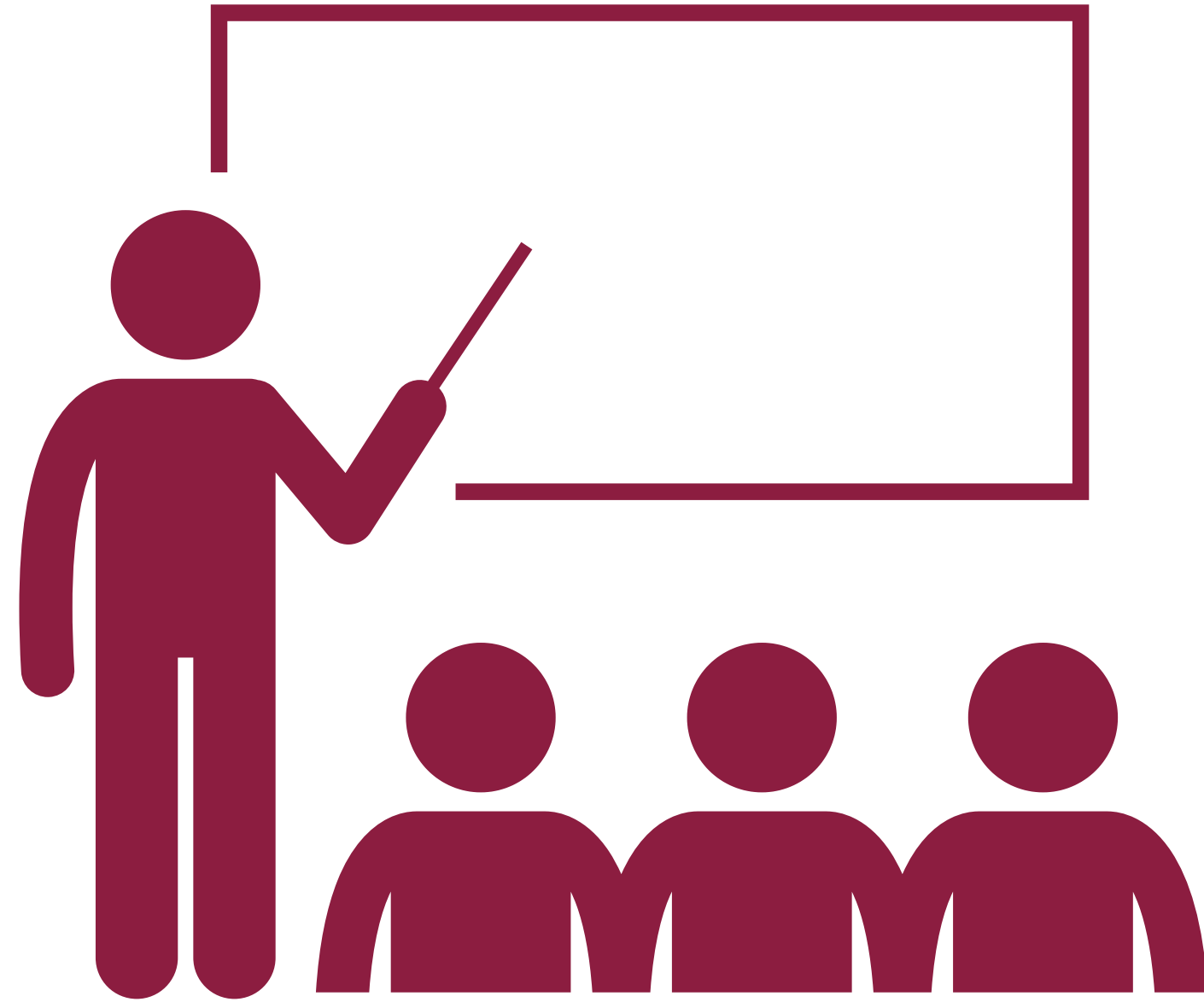


- the level of evidence for a program effect depends on the research methods used to gather the evidence
- how confident are we that the evidence supports the conclusion - “it works”



levels of evidence

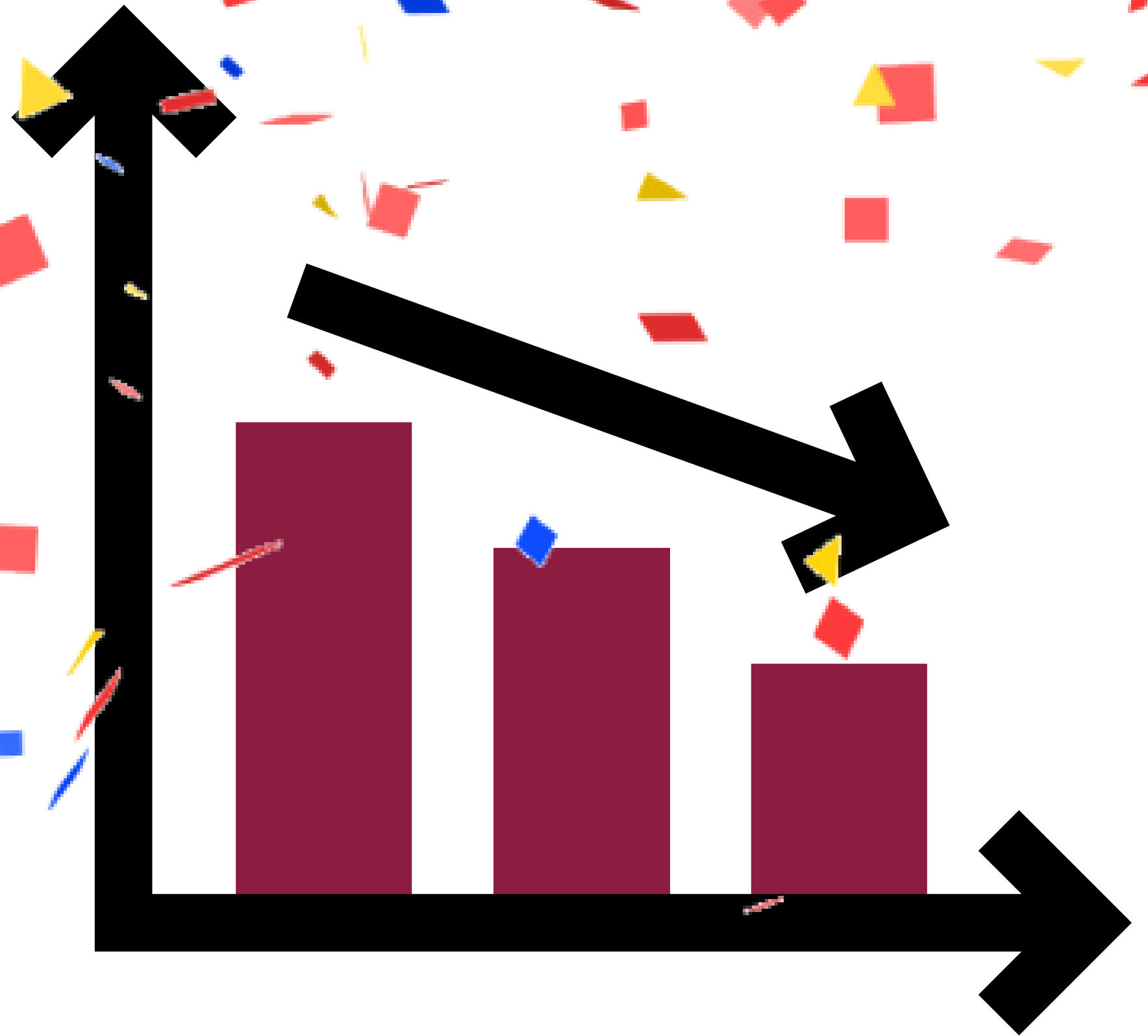
Before



AFTER

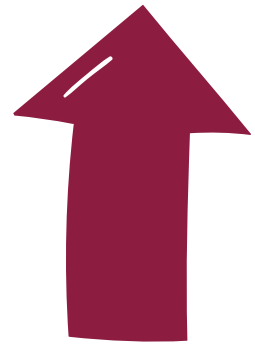


RESULTS

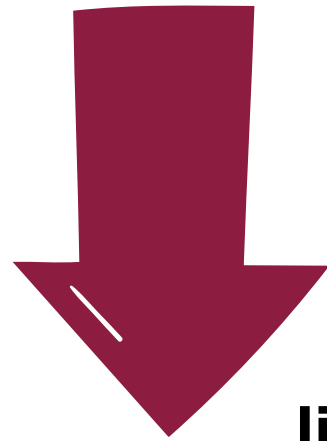


rigor of the study design

DOWN



UP



likelihood of other explanations

study designs

- Open Trial
 - intervention group only [**no control group**]
- Quasi-Experimental Trial
 - intervention + **non-random control group**
- Randomized Controlled Trial
 - **randomized** intervention + control group

other explanations



time



selection



history



did the program
CAUSE conflict
to decrease?

using
evidence to
select
programs



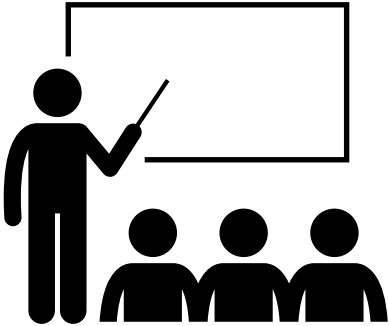
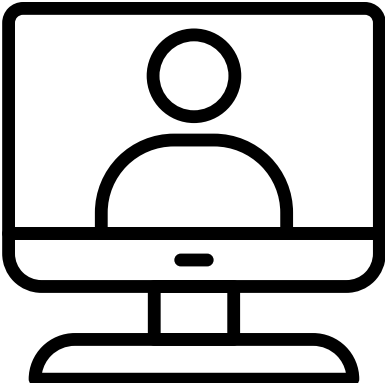
EXAMPLE

POPULATION: Separated and divorcing parents of children 3-18..

GOALS:


- ✓ increase knowledge
- ✓ build parenting skills
- ✓ avoid use of court services and relitigation



Modality	Features & Resource Requirements	Evidence of Effects	Conclusion	Does the evidence match the goal?
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Group exercises for strengthening skill and motivation • 10 group sessions • \$600 - \$700 per person 	<p>3 Randomized Trials Improved multiple outcomes for children up to 15 years later – mental health, substance use, involvement in criminal justice system</p>	<p>Level of evidence is very high to strengthen parenting and reduce multiple child problems over 15 years.</p>	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Digital exercises for strengthening skill and motivation • 6 sessions (weekly) • engagement checks • \$49 per person 	<p>One Randomized Trial Improved outcomes for children at posttest - mental health, exposure to conflict</p>	<p>Level of evidence is high to reduce conflict and improve child mental health outcomes at posttest.</p>	

Benefits

...of more precise
claims of evidence
based



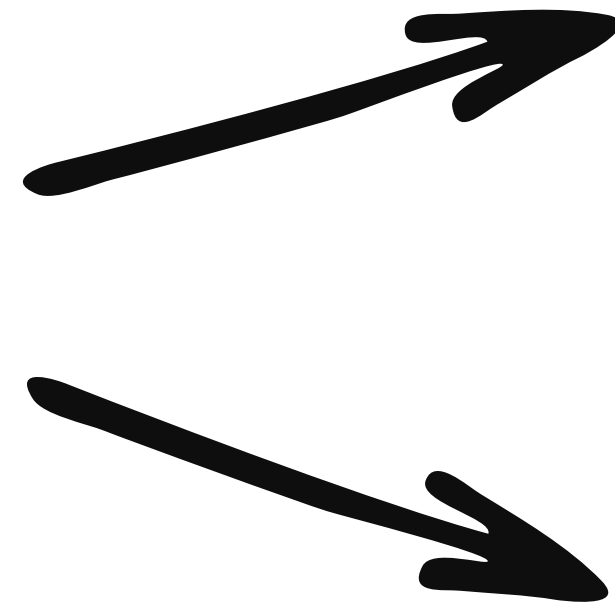
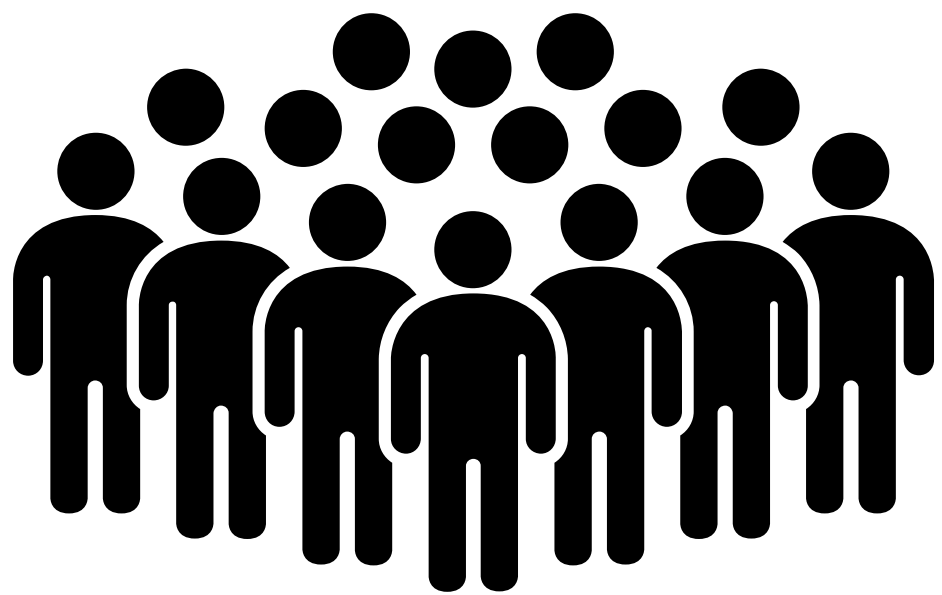
- **Stronger accountability**
 - to the public - addressing criticism about value of parent education
- **More informed decision making**
 - by the courts on program adoption.
 - Evidence is one part of the decision - other important issues (e.g., fit with court procedures, cost, satisfaction)
- **Encourage evidence of effectiveness**
 - researchers will need to collect and document evidence
 - rigorous research & long term evaluations will increase the quality of parent education programs in the court.



**The
Families
in Transition
Program**



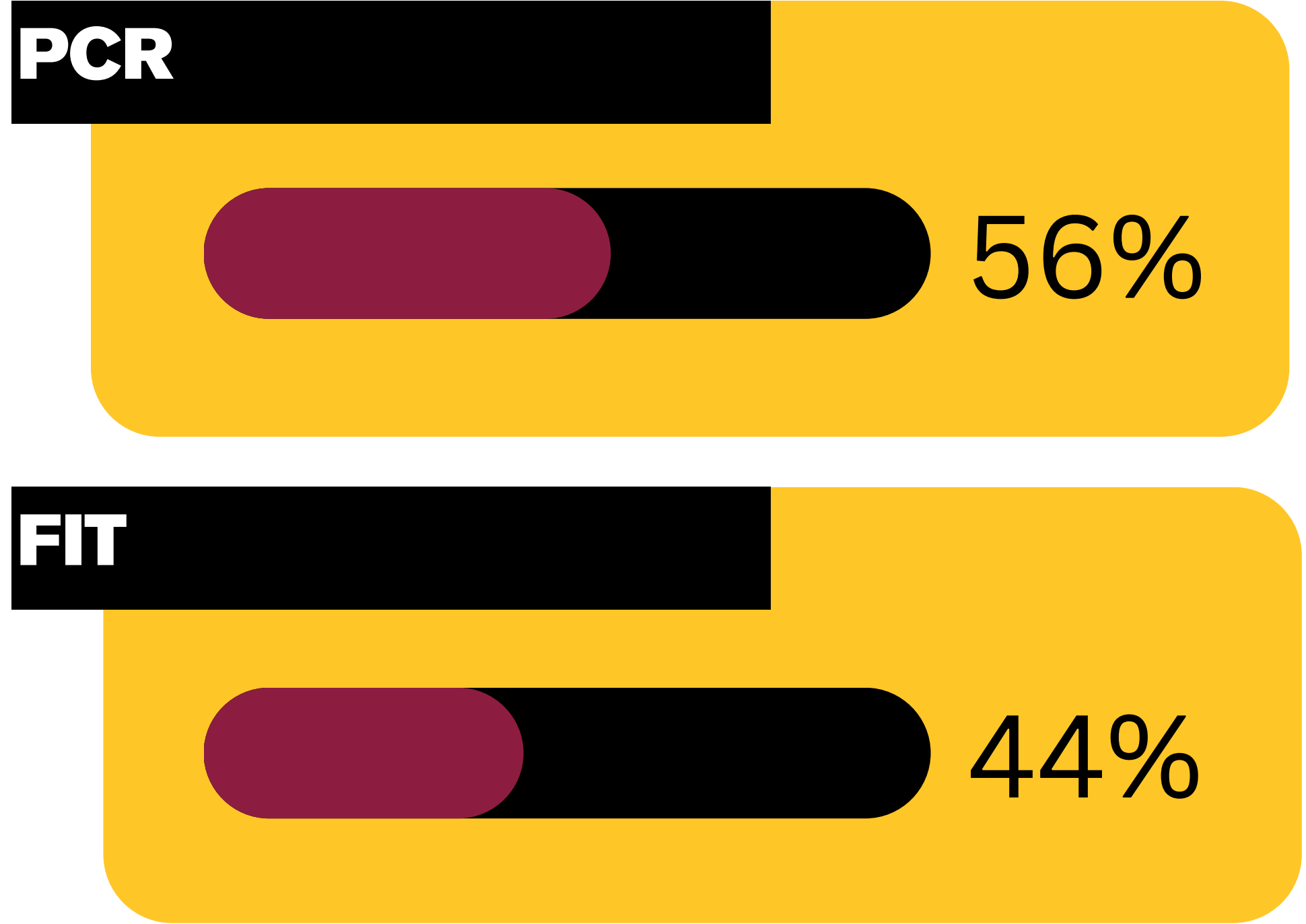
study overview



N = 264

January - June 2023

Maricopa County, Arizona



study overview



pretest
n = 190

posttest
n = 196

follow-up
n = 175

1

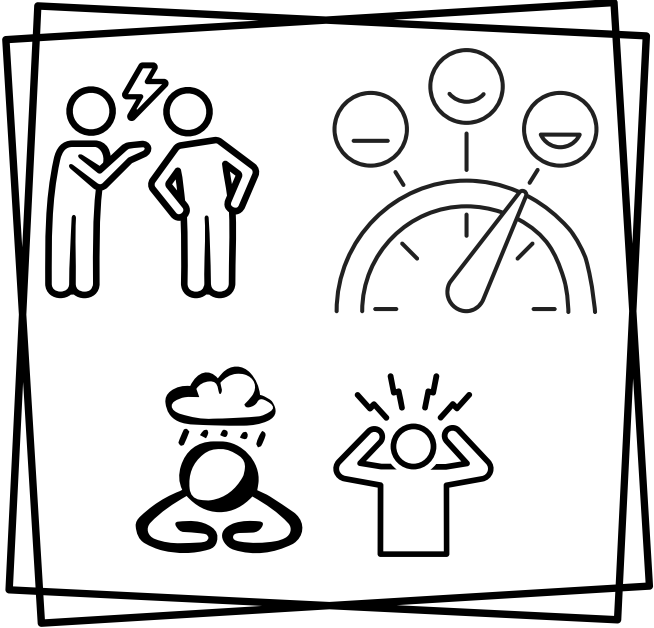
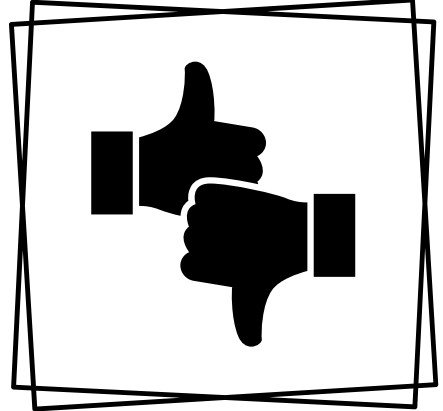
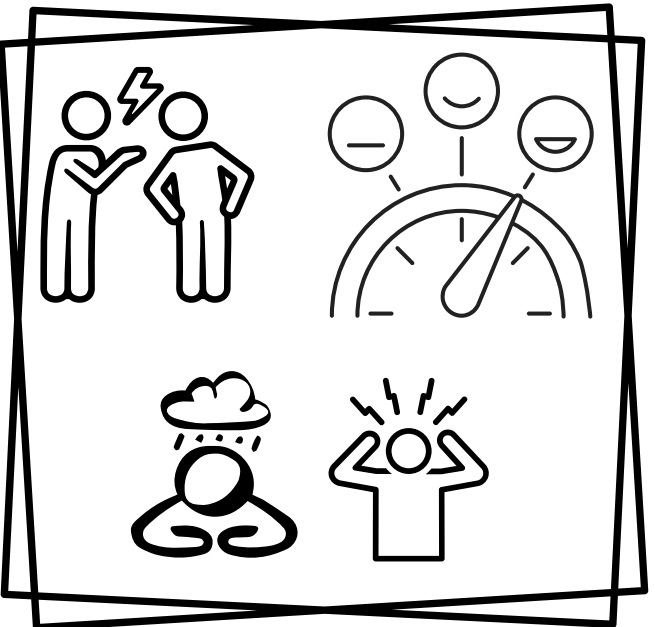
2

3

immediately
before the program

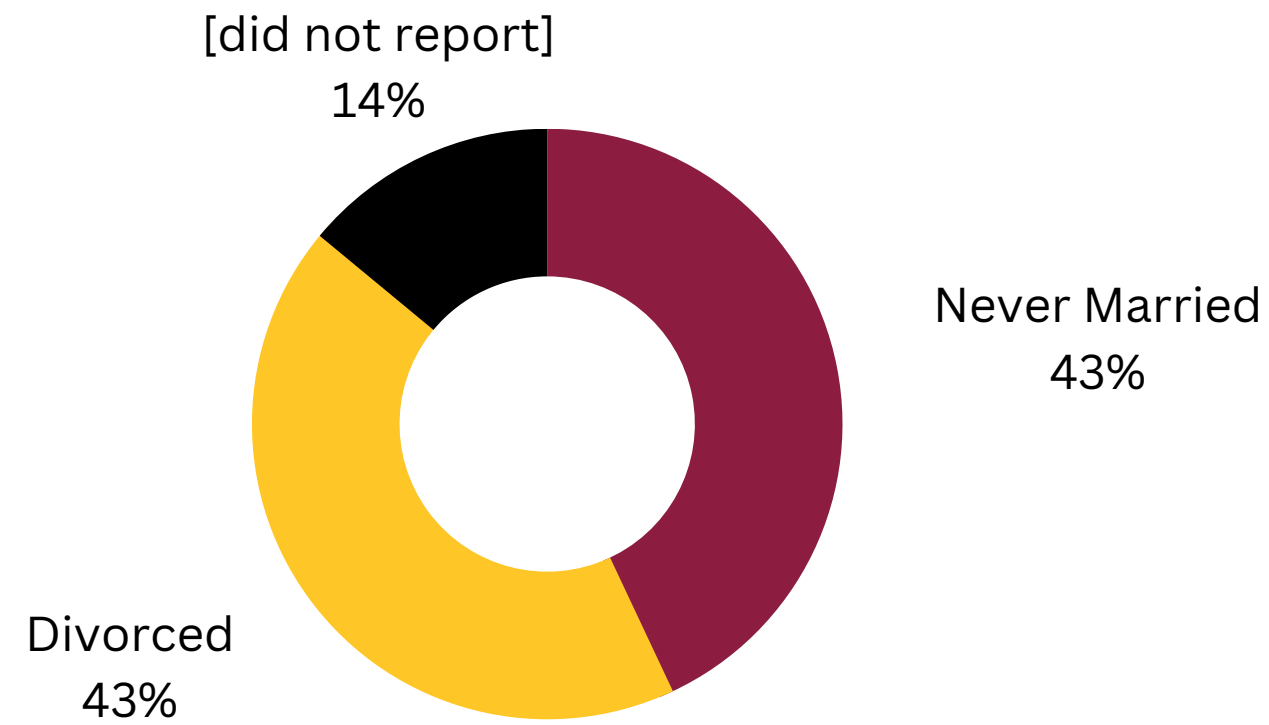
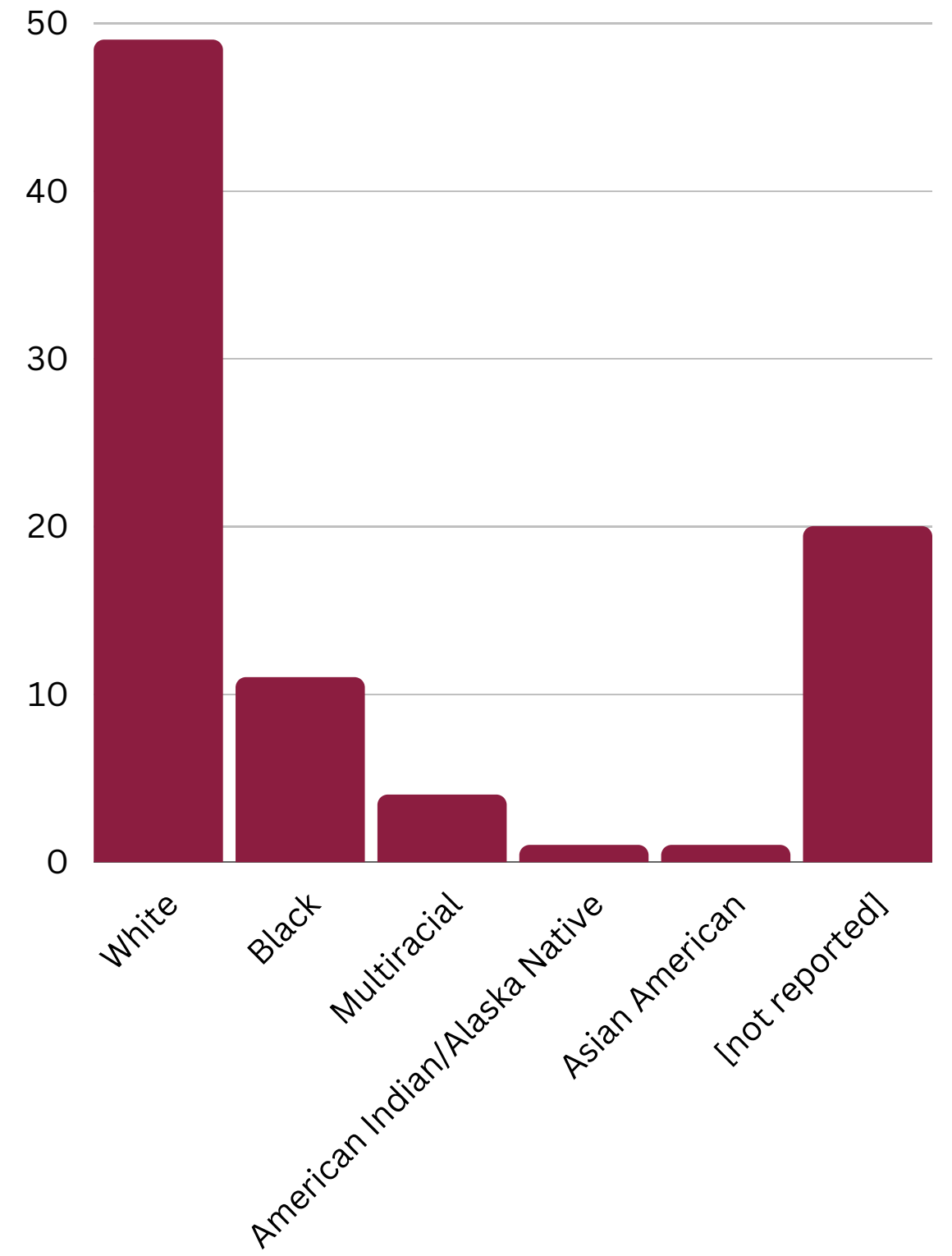
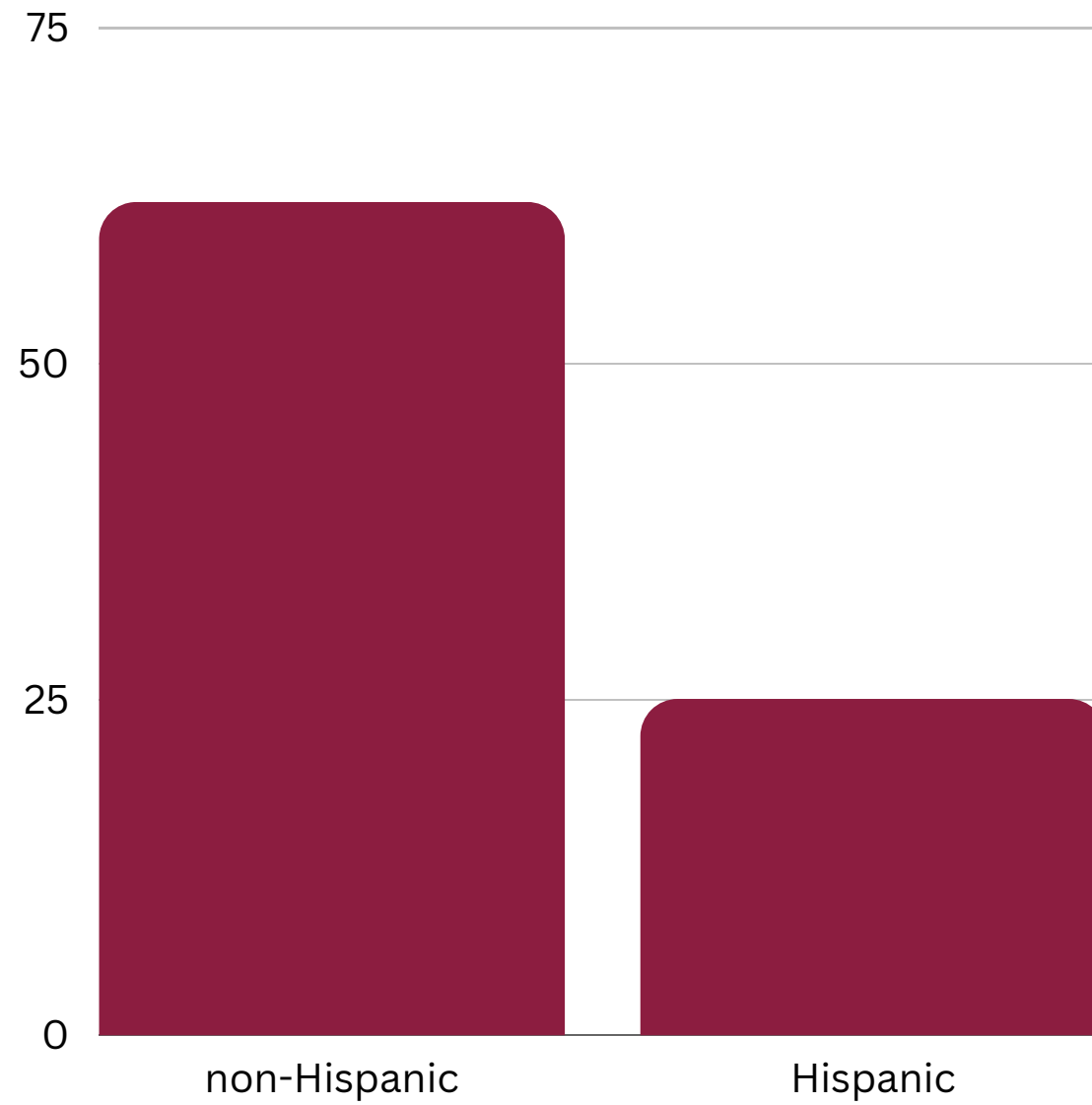
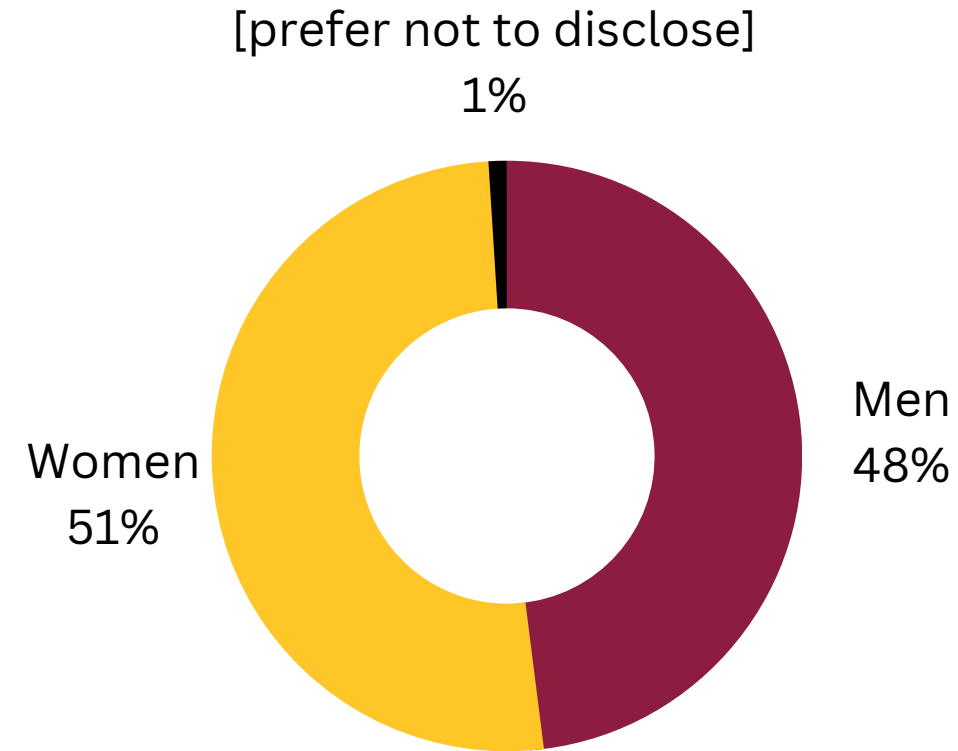
immediately
after the program

one month
after the program



216 did at least 1 survey

participants





Research Question #1

Are there differences in the perceived acceptability, feasibility, appropriateness, and usability of the content taught in FIT vs. PCR?

No.

There were no statistically observed differences in the mean level of perceived acceptability, feasibility, appropriateness, and usability of the content taught in FIT vs. PCR.



Research Question #2

Did participants report significant changes in conflict or emotion regulation from the beginning to the 30-day follow-up?

Yes and No.

We observed a significant decline in self-reported interparental conflict from the start of the program to the 30-day check-in ($t[145] = 3.44, p < .001$).

However, there wasn't a statistically significant shift in self-reported emotion regulation issues ($t[146] = 0.74, p = .460$).

results



Research Question #2

Were there differences in magnitude of change in the FIT vs. PCR programs?

PCR

The reduction in conflict was not statistically significant ($t[76] = 1.25, p = .216$), and similarly, there was no significant shift in emotional regulation problems ($t[75] = 0.78, p = .442$).

vs

FIT

Parents noted a significant reduction in conflict ($t[67] = 3.78, p < .001$). However, there was no significant change observed in emotional regulation issues ($t[69] = 0.21, p = .834$).

When we directly comparing the groups, even though the decrease in conflict appeared more pronounced in the FIT program than in the PCR program, this difference was not statistically significant.



Research Question #3

Did participants report significant changes in child mental health problems from the beginning to the 30-day follow-up?

Yes and No.

We observed a significant decline in parent-reported child externalizing problems from the start of the program to the 30-day check-in ($t[161] = -2.36$, $p = .019$). However, there wasn't a statistically significant shift in parent-reported child internalizing problems ($t[163] = -1.53$, $p = .128$).

results



Research Question #3

Were there differences in magnitude of change in the FIT vs. PCR programs?

PCR

The reduction in child externalizing problems was not statistically significant ($t[109] = -1.42, p = .159$), and similarly, there was no significant shift in child internalizing problems ($t[110] = -0.83, p = .407$)

vs

FIT

Parents noted a significant reduction in child externalizing problems ($t[51] = -2.42, p < .018$). However, there was no significant change observed in child internalizing problems ($t[52] = -1.28, p = .205$).

When we directly comparing the groups, even though the decrease in child externalizing problems appeared more pronounced in the FIT program than in the PCR program, this difference was not statistically significant.

conclusions

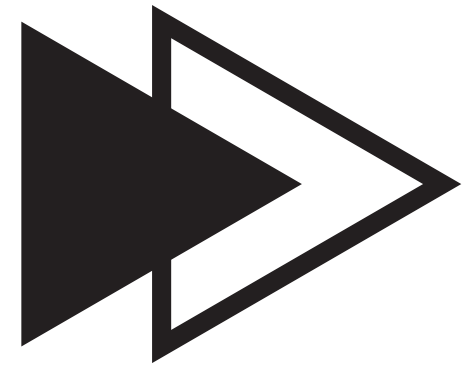


How is it possible to observe change in one group, no change in another, yet not definitively conclude that the two groups are different?

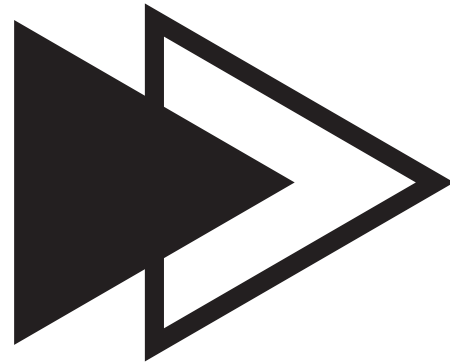
conclusions



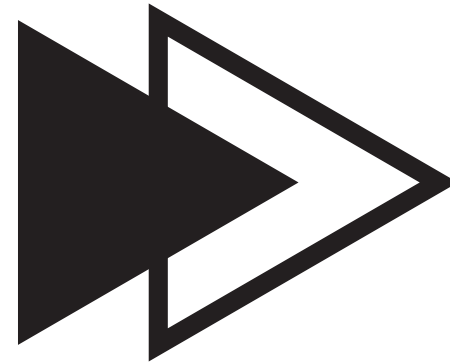
The Families in Transition (FIT) Program...



was designed to be a scalable, early intervention program for parents facing high conflict after separation/divorce.



has shown incredible promise to reduce parent conflict and child behavior problems in pilot testing.



is ready to be evaluated on a larger scale so that we can continue to test it to understand and improve its effects.



Future Directions



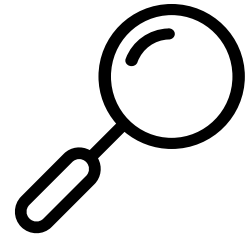


**Adaptive
Coping**

**Conflict
Reduction**

**Quality
Parenting**

Conflict Reduction



Monitoring Implementation and Effects of the FIT Program



**SCALABLE &
EFFECTIVE
PROGRAM FOR
HIGH-CONFLICT
PARENTS**



FAMILY COURT REVIEW
An Interdisciplinary Journal



A Call for Early, Effective, and Scalable Parent Education for High-Conflict Separated/Divorcing Parents: A Synthesized Perspective from Prevention Science and Family Law

O'Hara, K. L.¹ and Cohen, B.²

Quality Parenting

PROJECT P.E.A.C.E.

PROMOTING CHILDREN'S EMOTIONAL SECURITY AFTER CONFLICT EVENTS



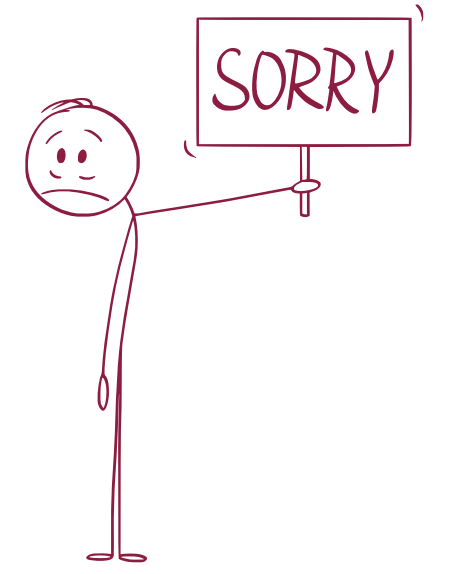
INSTITUTE FOR
Mental Health Research

P
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*apologize
and repair
tool*

*fight fair
tools*

reassure tool



Child Coping

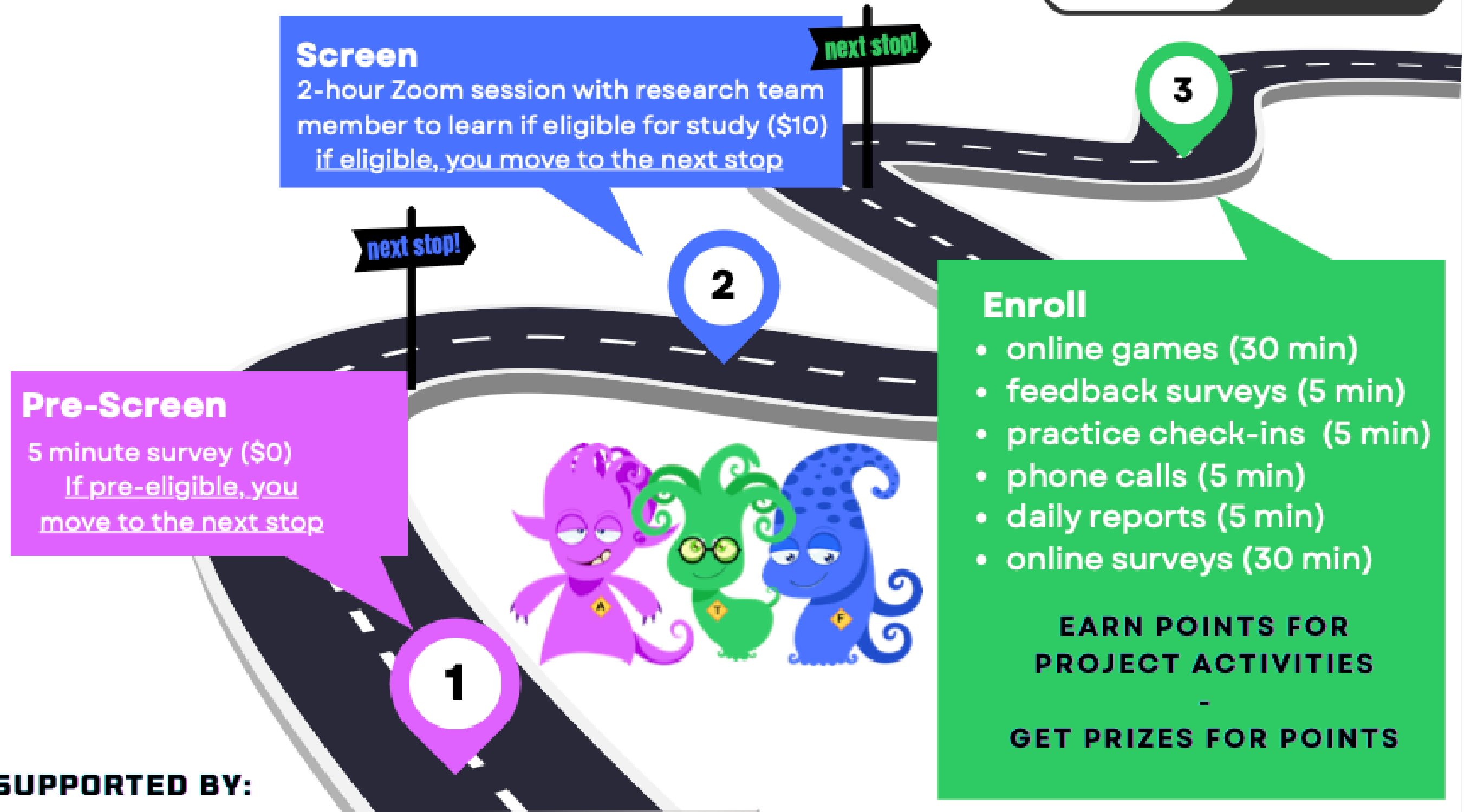
Scan here to automatically send us an email for more information.



We cannot do this work without our community partners!

PROJECT BRAIN TEAM

LEARNING ABOUT THE BRAIN CAN HELP CHILDREN DEAL WITH TOUGH THOUGHTS & FEELINGS!



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YFACSLAB@ASU.EDU

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Thank you!



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