



Using Text Messages to Build Parents’ Capacity to Improve Child Language-Learning Opportunities

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Early Language Experiences

- Infants and toddlers from disadvantaged families hear about 30 million fewer words by their 4th birthday than other children (Hart & Risley, 1995).
- Academic success at 9 and 10 can be linked to the talk heard from birth through age 3 (Hart & Risley, 1995).
- Children who fail to acquire effective communication skills can experience relative social isolation irrespective of whatever other abilities they possess (Warren & Walker, 2005).



Parent Engagement

- Home visiting parenting programs have shown positive results with high-risk populations, but meta-analyses have not reported consistently positive outcomes for parents and children (Astuto & Allen, 2009; Sweet & Appelbaum, 2004).
- Parent engagement is a barrier to home visiting effectiveness (Korfmacher et al, 2008).
- Programs that are able to maintain parents’ participation and keep them actively engaged are more likely to achieve improvements in parent and child outcomes (Gomby, 2005).
- A randomized trial examining the impact of cellular phones and text messaging on parent engagement in a home-based intervention resulted in reduced attrition, improvements in responsive parenting, and lower rates of parenting stress and depression (Carta, Lefever, Bigelow, Borkowski, & Warren, 2013).

The **primary aims** of this project are to examine how cellular phone technology can:

- 1) Increase and maintain parent engagement in an evidence-based intervention, and
- 2) Increase parents’ use of language promoting strategies, and thus improve child communication and language skills of infants and toddlers receiving Early Head Start and Part C /IDEA early intervention services.

Intervention Design and Participants

- Randomized Controlled Trial, followed by secondary analyses examining effects of number of text messages sent.
- Families randomly assigned:
 - Promoting Communication (PC) Strategies (n=69)
 - PC Strategies PLUS text messaging enhanced PC Strategies (n=58)

<i>Child and Family Demographics</i>		Control (N = 58)		Intervention (N = 69)	
Family Characteristic		Count	%	Count	%
Primary Caregiver Education					
Less than High School		20	63%	12	38%
High School or GED		25	37%	43	63%
Post-high-school Training		13	50%	13	50%
Not Available		0	0%	1	100%
Household Yearly Income					
<10k		21	41%	30	59%
10-20k		24	49%	25	51%
20k+		12	48%	13	52%
Not Available		1	50%	1	50%
English Language Use					
None		6	38%	10	63%
Some (spoken, not primary)		8	57%	6	43%
Primary		44	45%	53	55%
		Mean (SD)	Range	Mean	Range
Length of Time in Study		8.25 (4.78)	[1, 23]	8.16 (5.64)	[1, 22]
		Control (N = 64)		Intervention (N = 86)	
Child Characteristic		Count	%	Count	%
Ind Family Service Plan Before 3					
No		39	42%	54	58%
Yes		17	44%	22	56%
Not Available		8	44%	10	56%



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Promoting Communication Strategies

- Naturalistic strategies, designed to be flexible and individualized to unique skills, needs, and diverse backgrounds of families.
- Strategies integrated with family goals.
- Families implement strategies across daily routines.
- Intervention Coach supports intervention delivery.
- Materials can be found at <http://www.talk.ku.edu>



Promoting Communication Strategies	PC Intervention Resources
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Arranging the Environment• Following a Child’s Lead• Commenting and Labeling• Imitating and Expanding• Asking Open-Ended Questions• Time Delay/Fill in the Blank• Positive Attention and Praise• Providing Choices	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Intervention coach• Home visitor/parent manual• Video clips• PC Strategies poster• Routine-specific activity cards• Parent self-checks• Graphic feedback for parents• Home visitor implementation reports

Cellular Phone Intervention

- Text messages support parents’ use of the PC Strategies, and promote parent engagement.
- Text message “menu” provided, but home visitors encouraged to individualize.
- Content focused on PC Strategies, but also supportive messages, fun, free resources.
- Text messages were to be sent 5x per week (3 from home visitor; 2 from coach).
- Messages could be scheduled in advance and programmed for multiple recipients.
- Intervention coaches’ text messages focused on PC Strategies.

Text Message Examples

PC Strategies text message:	Supportive text message:
<i>I heard Sylvie saying “more, more” last week. Try imitating and expanding on this with “More milk. I want more milk.” This can help build her vocabulary.</i>	<i>I know this is a challenging time for your family. You’re really holding everything together for everyone. Make sure you take time to take care of yourself. Let’s talk more when we meet.</i>

Parent and Home Visitor Satisfaction

<i>Parent and Home Visitor Social Validity Data Summary</i>	
Item	% rating “mostly true” or “very much true”
<i>Parent’s Satisfaction of Promoting Communication Strategies</i>	
I plan to continue using the Strategies with my child(ren) in the future.	98%
I would recommend the Strategies to other parents or family members.	97%
<i>Parent’s Satisfaction of Text Messaging</i>	
Text messaging is a good way to stay in touch with my home visitor	100%
Text messaging helped me feel more involved with my home visitor.	98%
Text messaging helped me use what I learned with my child.	91%
The total number of text messages I received was just right for me.	88%
<i>Home Visitor’s Satisfaction of Promoting Communication Strategies</i>	
I would you recommend the PC strategies to other Home Visitors.	100%
<i>Home Visitor’s Satisfaction of Text Messaging</i>	
It was easy to fit text messaging into my schedule.	63%
Text messaging was useful in helping to connect/communicate with parents.	81%
Text messaging was useful in helping to promote parent engagement.	93%



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Randomized Trial Results

- **Differences in the effects of the text messaging enhancement to PC TALK were not found to reach statistical significance:**
 - The differences on the linear and quadratic slopes of parent-rated engagement between the intervention and control group were -0.39 (SE = 0.46, p = 0.77), and 0.03 (SE = 0.03, p = 0.26), respectively.
 - The differences on the linear and quadratic slopes of home-visitor-rated engagement between the two groups were 0.02 (SE = 0.48, p = 0.97), and 0.002 (SE = 0.03, p = 0.95), respectively.
 - For the growth rate of parent’s use of PC strategies, the difference between the two groups were 0.42 (SE = 0.85, p =0.62).
 - The effect of text messaging on the growth rates of Preschool Language Scale-Auditory Comprehension, Preschool Language Scale-Expressive Communication, Early Communication Indicator, and observed Child Communication were 0.17 (SE = 0.09, p = 0.07), 0.11 (SE = 0.08, p = 0.18), -0.06 (SE = 0.09, p = 0.49) and 0.04 (SE = 0.08, p = 0.64), respectively.

Secondary Analyses—Effects of Number of Texts Sent

- **Focusing on the Text Messaging Group only (n=58), to more closely examine the effects of differences related to variations in text messaging dosage, in relation to the goal of 5 text messages per week:**
 - **Do parents who received more text messages demonstrate greater engagement?**
 - For each additional PC strategy-related text sent from home visitors, there would be a 0.26-unit increase in the growth rate of engagement, which ranged from -0.31 to 2.29 in this model (0.26, SE = 0.11, p = 0.02).
 - For each additional texts sent from intervention coaches there was a 0.09-unit increase in the growth rate of home visitor-rated engagement, which ranged from - 0.09 to 1.27 in this model.
 - **Do parents who received more text messages implement the PC strategies at higher fidelity?**
 - For each additional PC strategy-related text sent by home visitors, there was an increase of 3.33 additional PC strategies used by parents, which ranged from 9 to 305 in the sample (3.33, se =1.05, $p < 0.01$).
 - For each additional text sent, there was an increase of 2.38 additional PC strategies used by parents (2.38, SE = 0.75, $p < 0.01$).
 - **Does text messaging dosage have indirect effects on child language outcomes through parent’s PC strategy fidelity?**
 - One additional *PC strategy-related text* sent from home visitor tended to improve parent’s use of strategies, which then led to an increase by 0.09 in their child Preschool Language Scale-Expressive Communication (PLS-EC) scores ($a_i^* b_{ij} = 2.95 * 0.03 = 0.09$, CI = [0.019, 0.184]). The *total number of texts sent* from home visitors also had a significant mediated effect on PLS-EC through parent’s use of strategies ($a_i^* b_{ij} = 0.04$, CI = [0.004, 0.104]).
 - One additional *PC strategy-related text* sent tended to improve parent’s use of strategies and then led to an increase by 0.11 in their children’s ECI weighted total score ($a_i^* b_{ij} = 3.00 * 0.04 = 0.11$, CI = [0.017, 0.242]). Also, a significant mediated effect was found for *total texts sent* from home visitors on ECI ($a_i^* b_{ij} = 0.06$, CI = [0.008, 0.127]).
 - One additional *PC strategy related text* sent from a home visitor tended to improve parent’s use of strategies, and then led to an increase by 0.20 in observed Child Communication Weighted Total Rate ($a_i^* b_{ij} = 2.91 * 0.07 = 0.20$, CI = [0.051, 0.410]). We also found a mediated effect for *total texts sent* from home visitors on Child Communication ($a_i^* b_{ij} = 0.11$, CI = [0.012, 0.250]).