

**Final Report**  
**Evidence-based Parent Training for Adoptive Couples (PTAC)**  
**Grant #: 1R43HD092124-01**

Beginning and Ending Period: **09/01/2017 – 08/31/2019**

**Key Personnel:**

| <u>Name</u>        | <u>Role</u>                   |
|--------------------|-------------------------------|
| Adam Wendt         | Principal Investigator        |
| Teresa Trusty      | Co-Investigator/Scientist     |
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| Abbie Goldberg     | Co-Investigator               |
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Goal 1: The Parenting Pride course we began to develop in Phase I begins to address the gap in parenting education for sexual and gender minority (SGM) parents. The course tailors evidence-based parent training to the unique challenges of SGM parents and features SGM models with whom the target audience can readily identify. By using a mobile responsive website to deliver the course, SGM couples have access to needed instruction that their individual communities might not be able to deliver. To ensure the course is relevant and acceptable to SGM-parent families, Co-I Abbie Goldberg, Ph.D. reviewed all content including video scripts and handouts. Co-I Goldberg is an expert in adoption, same-gender families, and transgender issues. The project team also developed appropriate branding and messaging for the study population.

For Phase I, we developed three complete modules for the course: Introduction to Parenting Pride, Give Effective Directions, and Respond to Emotions (Please see Appendix A for screenshots). Each module contains one explanatory or modeling video. The introductory video discusses issues pertinent to SGM parents like how to share a family's unique origin story with children and the prevalence of bullying based upon family type and parental sexual orientation. The next two videos model parenting skills to give effective directions and manage emotions. These two modules also include interactive video knowledge checks which show wrong-way scenarios (e.g., giving an imprecise direction while not being close to the child, parent's poor emotion regulation and the impact on children), then ask the participant to identify how to better respond to the situation. After responding to the multiple-choice question and viewing feedback about their response, the participant sees a right-way scenario to reinforce the correct application of the skill taught. Each module also has a printable summary with key points and steps for the parenting skills taught. Additionally, module three contains five audio-recorded guided meditations that were a mix of general approaches like the 4-7-8 breathing technique and meditations with content specific to parents like parenting with self-compassion.

Goal 2: We assessed the feasibility of *Parenting Pride* in terms of relevance, acceptability, cultural appropriateness, and potential for efficacy using a within subjects pre-post design. We measured changes in participant stress, self-efficacy, parenting practices, and knowledge. Additionally, we collected a post-test evaluation of consumer satisfaction and recommendations for modifications to the program.

## Method

### Participants.

Fifty participants from across the United States identifying as being in a same-gender relationship with children between the ages of 4 and 12 participated in the feasibility study. Nineteen participants identified their gender as male, 30 as female, and 1 as non-binary. Nineteen reported their sexual orientation as gay, 24 as lesbian, 4 as queer, and 3 as bisexual. The average age was 42.2 years old (SD = 7.0; range 29-58). Forty-three participants identified as white, 1 as Black or African-American, 2 as Asian, and 4 as multiracial. Seven participants identified as being of Hispanic, Latino, or Spanish origin. Two participants reported having some college but no degree, 17 had a Bachelor's degree, and 31 had a graduate degree. Forty-seven participants reported they were married or in a domestic partnership, 2 were divorced, and 1 was single and never married. Forty-five participants reported being employed, 2 as unemployed but looking for work, 2 as unemployed but not looking, and 1 was retired. The average number of children in the families was 2.0 (SD = 1.2; range 1-8) with an average age of 4.5 (SD = 4.6; range 1-24).

### Procedures.

We recruited SGM parents by broadcasting recruitment materials via email to over 100 non-profit organizations providing services to gay, lesbian, and transgender people. We also worked with a panel company, Community Marketing, Inc. specializing in this population. They emailed the recruitment materials to a subset of their panelists who had children. All potential participants were directed to Qualtrics to complete an eligibility screening for meeting the following inclusion criteria: (a) being an SGM parent in a relationship, (b) having a child aged 4–12 years old, (c) having email and mobile connectivity, and (d) one parent participant per family. Eligible participants received a written explanation of study requirements and were asked to complete a digital informed consent. Upon meeting the criteria and providing consent, we sent participants an email from Qualtrics directing them to complete the pre-test assessment measures (see Measures below). Within one week of pre-test completion, participants received access to the *Parenting Pride* digital course for three weeks (one week per module). After three weeks, participants who completed all three modules received an email from Qualtrics with a link to complete the post-assessment. Participants were sent a check for \$100 after completing the course and the two assessments.

### Measures.

Assessments consisted of demographics (age, gender, race, sexual orientation, religion, etc.); the *Parental Stress Scale (PSS)*<sup>1</sup>; the *Parent Sense of Competence Scale (PSOC)*<sup>2</sup> as well as a self-efficacy measure developed during the project that evaluated the skills taught in the course; the *Alabama Parenting Questionnaire (APQ)*<sup>3</sup>; and a knowledge test on the information taught in the program.

As perceived relevance and usability of the program is seen as an important barrier to adoption, a user satisfaction survey was collected at posttest. Likert-style and open-ended items measured (a) acceptability, (b) relevance, and (c) satisfaction.

## Results

We hypothesized that using the *Parenting Pride* program would decrease stress; increase self-efficacy and knowledge; and improve parenting practices. There were improvements on all outcome measures, with the exception of the parenting practices on the APQ (see Table 1). Specifically, there were significant improvements in stress,  $t_{(48)} = -2.48, p = .017$ ; self-efficacy on both the PSOC,  $t_{(48)} = 2.18, p = .034$  and the program specific scale,  $t_{(48)} = 3.09, p = .003$ ; and knowledge,  $t_{(48)} = 6.68, p < .001$

Overall, participants were very positive about the *Parenting Pride* course design and its content. On average they rated the course 4.26 stars (SD = 0.80) out of five. When asked how well *Parenting*

*Pride* met their needs, the average was 4.1 (SD = 0.81) on a 5-point scale. 100% stated it met their needs with 19 (38%) selecting "Very Well", 17 (44%) selecting "Well", and 14 (28%) selecting "Adequately". Also on 5-point Likert-scales, participants positively rated course alignment with learning objectives (M = 4.54; SD = .61) and the design of the course (M = 4.30; SD = 0.70). When asked if they would recommend *Parenting Pride*, 41 participants agreed or strongly agreed, six said they neither agreed nor disagreed, and three disagreed (M = 4.18; SD = .86). Two who disagreed found the parenting skills content too rudimentary while the third said content focusing on SGM parenting challenges was dated as was the look and feel of the course. When we asked parents about their parenting skills and relationship with their children following the course, the majority said they saw improvement in these areas (see Table 2).

**Table 1. Pretest-Posttest Descriptive Statistics and paired t-test Results. N = 50**

| Measure / condition  | Pretest <i>M</i><br>( <i>SD</i> ) | Posttest <i>M</i><br>( <i>SD</i> ) | <i>t</i> - test | <i>p</i> -value | Cohen's <i>d</i> |
|--|-----------------------------------|------------------------------------|-----------------|-----------------|------------------|
| Stress (PSS)   | 2.27<br>(0.60)                    | 2.18<br>(0.55)                     | -2.48           | .017            | -0.35            |
| Self-Efficacy (PSOC)   | 3.74<br>(0.76)                    | 3.85<br>(0.72)                     | 2.18            | .034            | 0.31             |
| Self-Efficacy (Program Specific)   | 3.01<br>(0.60)                    | 3.21<br>(0.49)                     | 3.09            | .003            | 0.44             |
| Positive Parenting (APQ)   | 4.49<br>(0.49)                    | 4.42<br>(0.52)                     | -0.95           | .345            | -0.13            |
| Inconsistent Discipline (APQ)  | 2.29<br>(0.75)                    | 2.29<br>(0.69)                     | 0.10            | .922            | 0.01             |
| Poor Supervision (APQ)   | 1.24<br>(0.55)                    | 1.23<br>(0.46)                     | -0.35           | .728            | -0.05            |
| Knowledge  | 8.72<br>(1.93)                    | 10.36<br>(1.68)                    | 6.68            | .001            | 0.95             |
| Cohen's <i>d</i> of 0.8, 0.5, and 0.2 are considered large, medium, small effect sizes, respectively (Cohen, 1988). <sup>4</sup> |                                   |                                    |                 |                 |                  |

**Table 2: Parenting Skills and Benefits to Children**

|   | Strongly Disagree | Disagree | Neither Agree or Disagree | Agree | Strongly Agree | Mean | SD   |
|---|-------------------|----------|---------------------------|-------|----------------|------|------|
| I learned practical parenting skills from <i>Parenting Pride</i> .                      | 0                 | 2        | 5                         | 19    | 24             | 4.30 | 0.81 |
| I improved my parenting by participating in this course.                                | 1                 | 1        | 14                        | 18    | 16             | 3.94 | 0.94 |
| I communicate better with my child(ren) following this course.                          | 1                 | 1        | 14                        | 17    | 17             | 3.96 | 0.95 |
| My child(ren) have benefitted because of skills I learned from <i>Parenting Pride</i> . | 0                 | 2        | 14                        | 20    | 14             | 3.92 | 0.85 |

On 4-point scales, the majority of participants rated the content ( $M = 3.02$ ;  $SD = 0.94$ ), videos ( $M = 2.96$ ;  $SD = 0.95$ ), and mindfulness exercises included in the module about responding to your emotions ( $M = 2.70$ ;  $SD = 0.85$ ) as relevant. They found the content in the two skills-based modules to be very useful: Give Effective Directions ( $M = 3.34$ ;  $SD = .72$ ) and Respond to Emotions ( $M = 3.15$ ;  $SD = .75$ ). All 50 participants tried giving effective directions and they found the strategy easy to use on a 5-point scale ( $M = 4.32$ ,  $SD = .84$ ). Thirty-nine participants tried the technique to respond to emotions which they also found easy to use ( $M = 4.78$ ,  $SD = .86$ ). We asked participants how helpful and useful the various course elements were with the videos ( $M = 3.22$ ;  $SD = 0.82$ ) being rated most helpful. They rated

the video knowledge checks ( $M = 3.12$ ;  $SD = .90$ ) and printable module summaries ( $M = 3.08$ ;  $SD = .85$ ) as useful and the feedback to knowledge checks ( $M = 3.02$ ;  $SD = 0.92$ ) and mindfulness exercises ( $M = 2.70$ ;  $SD = .92$ ) as helpful. When asked to compare *Parenting Pride* to other parenting resources they had used previously, 26 said the quality was better, 16 said about the same, one said worse, and seven said they hadn't used parenting resources previously. Only two people requested technical support with the course and both issues were resolved.

Participants also provided open-ended feedback in response to questions about acceptability and satisfaction and suggested improvements to the design of the course and the content. We discuss the most relevant findings here. Participants volunteered that the content easy to understand ( $n = 7$ ), practical ( $n = 8$ ), and realistic ( $n = 7$ ). However, 12 requested additional content discussing what to do when a skill was not effective, and 9 asked for more content specific to SGM-parent families like how to address bullying and how to discuss why a child does not have a mom or a dad. When asked what they liked most about the videos, they said they clearly modeled the skills ( $n = 20$ ), showed diverse SGM-parent families ( $n = 19$ ), and were practical and realistic ( $n = 5$ ). However, 13 participants said the acting could be improved in either the video examples or the video knowledge checks. Seventeen people recommended improvements to the video knowledge checks. However, there was little overlap in responses. Three participants suggested improving the answers and/or feedback and 3 suggested adding more knowledge checks. Only 1 person asked for fewer knowledge checks. Participants described the downloadable summary they found most useful as reinforcing the content ( $n = 17$ ) and relevant ( $n = 12$ ) whereas the summary they found least useful was not relevant to their particular situation ( $n = 13$ ). Only 12 participants offered suggestions to improve the summaries with providing a different format being the most requested ( $n = 10$ ). When asked what they liked about the course's design, participants said the course was user-friendly ( $n = 28$ ), the branding or aspects of the branding were good ( $n = 11$ ), and presentation of the content was good ( $n = 9$ ). The majority of participants did not recommend improvements to the design. However, 6 noted the navigation and/or the video controls were confusing. Finally, while participants responded positively to the logo, in particular praising the rainbow heart ( $n = 25$ ), the image of the parent and child ( $n = 23$ ), and the colors ( $n = 17$ ), 23 participants suggested making the two figures look less like Mickey Mouse ears.

## References

- 1 Berry, J. O. & Jones, W. H. (1995). The parental stress scale: Initial psychometric evidence. *Journal of Social and Personal Relationships, 12*(3), 463-472.
- 2 Johnston, C. & Mash, E. J. (1989). A measure of parenting satisfaction and efficacy. *Journal of clinical child psychology, 18*(2), 167-175.
- 3 Elgar, F. J., Waschbusch, D. A., Dadds, M. R. & Sigvaldason, N. (2007). Development and validation of a short form of the Alabama Parenting Questionnaire. *Journal of Child and Family Studies, 16*(2), 243-259.
- 4 Cohen, J. (1988). The effect size index: d. *Statistical power analysis for the behavioral sciences, 2284-288.*