



Relatable Parenting Program Evaluation

2020-2021 Program Year
Findings

Social Innovation Design & Evaluation Strategies
Dr. Katie Daniels

Table of Contents

Introduction & Background	2
Evaluation Questions & Methods	3
Findings.....	4
Participation, Demographics & Completion	4
Program Outcomes	5
Participant Evaluation of Program.....	9
Recommendations.....	13

Introduction & Background

The mission of Realism is Loyalty is *To Empower, Encourage, & Strengthen Youth in Spite of Story, System, or Choice. Realism is Loyalty provides a safe, relatable, comfortable space that promotes participant self-reflection and intensive engagement. [Youth are provided] a unique opportunity to explore their stories and the systems that created their illogical thought processes and irrational beliefs. The goal is to address the negative choices they make and lifestyles they lead, and to show them the reality of what could and should be.*

Realism is Loyalty's Relatable Parenting program supports high-risk youth and their parents to address loss, trauma, and grief appropriately and collectively. The families served by this program suffer from unaddressed multi-generational poverty and trauma that has resulted in a lack of communication, empathy for one another, and frequently a history of physical, sexual, and emotional abuse. Relatable Parenting helps families dealing with these issues to improve their communication, create appropriate boundaries and structure within their family unit, and ultimately change patterns of behavior that lead to negative life consequences. The Relatable Parenting programming emphasizes the development of trust through a "meet families where they are" approach utilizing robust evidence-based case management and family therapy practices. Services are delivered over the course of six months.

The Relatable Parenting programming was delivered in the Fall of 2020 and Spring of 2021 to 12 families. The work with each family was guided by a family-specific, customized, treatment plan established at the beginning of the program. The outcomes of the Relatable Parenting are to:

- assist the family in developing an awareness of how childhood issues have affected the family unit;
- resolve conflicting feelings that the parent and adolescent may have that are associated with childhood traumas and assist the family in appropriate coping strategies to resolve those feelings;
- assist youth in resolving past trauma and family issues, leading to less fear and anger, and greater confidence and self-esteem;
- assist the family working through the grieving process and the letting-go process and reach the point of emotionally reconnecting as a family unit;
- establish long-term treatment goals and therapeutic interventions for resolving parent/youth conflicts in healthy ways.

Evaluation Questions & Methods

The purpose of this evaluation of the Realism Is Loyalty Relatable Parenting program is to: 1) understand the extent to which the program outcomes were met; 2) identify areas for improvement that will foster further program development and increased program success; and 3) generate data to demonstrate program efficacy and success to external partners and audiences, including, but not limited to, funders, grantors, and other nonprofit agencies.

Relevant Audiences & Stakeholders

The audiences and stakeholders for this evaluation include Realism Is Loyalty staff, directors, board members, and program participants as well as, grantors, funders, and business leaders.

Evaluation Questions

This evaluation was driven by the following questions:

1. To what extent were the participant outcomes for the Relatable Parenting program met?
2. What is the perception of program participants about their experience with the program staff?
3. What is the perception of program participants (parents and youth) about their experience in the family therapy sessions?
4. What is the perception of the program participants about their experience in the parent support groups?
5. What are the recommendations for the Relatable Parenting program as it continues to be developed and refined?

Methods

Data for this evaluation was collected through the following methods.

Family Therapy Parent Evaluation. The Family Therapy Parent Evaluation was administered to parents at the end of every therapy session. It included questions about their experience with the therapist and therapeutic strategies from the session as well as questions about their ability to use and apply the strategies learned in the previous session.

Family Therapy Youth Evaluation. The Family Therapy Youth Evaluation was administered to each child at the end of the therapy session. It included questions about their experience with the therapist and their perception of the importance of the topics being explored.

Parent Workshop Evaluation. The Parent Workshop Evaluation was implemented for the second cohort. It included questions about their experience in and comfort level with the support groups, as well as a summative rating of their experience.

Parent Program Evaluation. The Parent Program Evaluation provided the opportunity for parents to identify the extent to which they felt the outcomes for the program were being met as well as the extent to which the issues they were working on had been resolved. It also included questions about their experience working with the program mentor.

Relatable Parenting Program Application. The Relatable Parenting Program Application was used to collect the program participant demographic information.

Findings

Participation, Demographics, & Completion

Twelve families participated in the program in the 20-21 winter cohort. Two-thirds of the families had one child and one-third of the families had two children (N=12). Of the parents participating in the program, 91% were not married (N=11). One grandparent participated in the program. Of the parent/guardian participants, 92% were female and 8% were male (N=12). Eighty-one percent of youth were male and 19% were female.

Table 1 Participant Gender

	Parent/Guardians		Youth	
	#	%	#	%
Male	1	8%	13	81%
Female	11	92%	3	19%

The families were primarily African American (83.3%, N=12). See all demographics for race in Table 2.

Table 2 Participant Race

	Parent/Guardians		Youth	
	#	%	#	%
African American	10	83.3%	10	83.3%
Hispanic	1	8.3%	1	8.3%
White	1	8.3%	1	8.3%

Of the twelve families that began the program, 7 (58%) completed all of the requirements.

Program Delivery

Due to Covid-19 RIL had to pivot the program to adhere to COVID-19 restrictions issued by the state, the programming was offered through two cohorts over six months, beginning in October 2020 and ending in March of 2021. Each cohort was composed of six families.

At the beginning of each of the two cohorts, the Realism Is Loyalty mental health team formally evaluated each family in order to identify the core issues they were facing. Formally assessing each family allowed the RIL team to identify the level of risk and need they faced in the following areas:

1. Prior and Current Offenses/Dispositions
2. Family Circumstances/Parenting
3. Education/Employment
4. Peer Relationships
5. Substance Use History
6. Leisure/Recreation Activity
7. Personality and Behavior Traits

Over the course of the programming, families were engaged in mentoring, family therapy, and group therapy in the form of parent support groups.

Program Outcomes

The primary focus of the outcomes for the Relatable Parenting programming was to help parents identify what childhood negative experiences they continue to struggle with and how this impacts their parenting and the relationship with their child. The specific program outcomes were as follows:

- assist the family in developing an awareness of how childhood issues have affected the family unit;
- resolve conflicting feelings that the parent and adolescent may have that are associated with childhood traumas and assist the family in appropriate coping strategies to resolve those feelings;
- assist youth in resolving past trauma and family issues, leading to less fear and anger, and greater confidence and self-esteem;
- assist the family working through the grieving process and the letting-go process and reach the point of emotionally reconnecting as a family unit;

- establish long-term treatment goals and therapeutic interventions for resolving parent/youth conflicts in healthy ways.

In order to address these outcomes, all members of the family engaged in activities to identify struggles from the past. Each parent examined their past and developed a personal narrative about the harmful events they believe have been passed down to their children. Parents then learned valuable skills and techniques to overcome struggles with the traumas they identified. Activities also included learning and applying skills to help the family manage overwhelming feelings and emotions, including strategies such as practicing “I” statements, though stopping techniques, and by labeling emotions and coming together as family to identify what it means when each individual person is feeling the identified emotion. Engaging in these strategies was not easy for families. Families initially struggled with using these strategies, as they brought on feelings of rejection, and anger from past experiences. Parents were provided psychoeducation on the stages of grief and encouraged to start using a grief journal to continue to process these feelings outside of the therapy session. Many parents struggled with accomplishing this task due to the belief that “I have been a great parent to my kids. I don’t know why they would feel like this”. By the end of the programming, parents were beginning to feel more comfortable examining their past and talking openly with their child(ren) about constructive ways to move forward.

Parents were asked the extent to which they were meeting the outcomes for the programming. The target benchmark for the outcomes is that 85% or more of parents will agree that they are developing an awareness of the issues and learning the coping strategies associated with them. *This benchmark was met for each of the seven goals associated with the program outcomes.*

One-hundred percent of parents felt that they were developing an awareness of how their own childhood issues may be affecting their family (N=8) and the sources of conflict created within their family (N=7). Eighty-eight percent also reported that they were learning how trauma affects families, strategies that can be used to address the emotional needs of their children, constructive ways to cope with emotional pain, and specific anger management techniques that they could use to overcome situational anger (N=8). See all findings in Table 3.

Table 3: Parental Self-Report of Achievement of Program Outcomes

Relatable Parenting Objectives	N	%3-5*	Average
Developing an awareness of how my own childhood issues may be affecting my family.	8	100%	4.6
Developing an awareness of the sources of conflict created within our family.	7	100%	4.6
Developing an awareness of the sources of pain created within our family.	8	88%	4.5
Learned strategies that can be used to address the emotional needs of my child(ren).	8	88%	4.4
Learned how childhood trauma affects families.	8	88%	4.4
Learned constructive ways to cope with emotional pain.	8	88%	4.3
Developed awareness of anger management techniques I can use to overcome situational anger.	8	88%	3.8

*% of parents who selected 3, 3.5, 4, 4.5, or 5 on a scale of 1-5, 1 = Strongly Disagree, 5 = Strongly Agree

During weekly family therapy sessions each individual in the family unit (parent/child) was provided psychoeducation on what acute, complex and generational trauma means and how it affects each individual differently. Each family member identified a time when they experienced each form of trauma. Families struggled with completing this task as it brought up a lot of repressed emotions. Techniques utilized to help the family process during this time were breathing techniques, muscle relaxation, and guided imagery techniques.

Family members were asked to compose a letter to each other expressing their thoughts, feelings and emotions. As well as what things can be done going forward to help reduce trauma triggers, and re-traumatization. Many parents were alarmed at the responses of their youth. The “open letter” activity seemed to be the most impactful. During this activity multiple breaks in between readings needed to be implemented. Due to the level of frustration and high rising emotions as parents and youth reacted to the content of each other letters. Grounding techniques, deep breathing and cognitive reframing were techniques that were utilized. Families were asked not to discuss the events of each session at home, instead to journal daily about reoccurring thoughts and feelings to be processed in the next family session. Some families were unsuccessful at doing this and this created a need for emergency therapy/case management crisis intervention services in the home.

Parents were asked how helpful the strategies and tools they learned in their therapy session were, the extent to which they were able to use the learned strategies in between their therapy

sessions, and whether they would use the strategy/tool again in the future. Ninety percent of parents felt each of these objectives were met. See Table 4 for all findings.

Table 4 Use of Strategies Learned in Therapy

	N	%3-5*	Average
I will use the strategy/tool again in the future.	61	90%	4.5
I was able to use a strategy/tool that I learned in the last session.	62	90%	4.4
The strategy/tool that I used was helpful.	61	90%	4.4

*% of parents who selected 3, 3.5, 4, 4.5, or 5 on a scale of 1-5, 1 = Strongly Disagree, 5 = Strongly Agree

Participants demonstrated an increased ability to use the strategies/tools learned in therapy over the course of the program. After the first therapy session 80% (Mean 4.1, N=5) of parents found the strategies/tools helpful and felt that they would be able to use what they had learned in the future; by their last therapy session 100% (Mean 4.6, N=5) of parents felt that they were meeting these objectives, demonstrating a 20% increase (Mean .5, N=5).

Table 5: Change in Use of Strategies Learned in Therapy Session

Therapy Session	N	First Therapy Session		Last Therapy Session		Change	
		%3-5*	Average	%3-5*	Average	%3-5*	Average
I was able to use a strategy/tool that I learned in the last session.	5	80%	4.1	100%	4.6	+20%	+ .5
The strategy/tool that I used was helpful.	5	80%	4.1	100%	4.6	+20%	+ .5
I will use the strategy/tool again in the future.	5	80%	4.1	100%	4.6	+20%	+ .5

*% of parents who selected 3, 3.5, 4, 4.5, or 5 on a scale of 1-5, 1 = Strongly Disagree, 5 = Strongly Agree

Overall, almost two-thirds of parents felt they had made improvement addressing the concerns in their household related to arguments, trust, and their overall relationship with their child. A little over half of the parents felt that they had made improvements related to concerns about family interactions. See all findings in Table 6.

Table 6 Progress Towards Resolving Concerns

Resolving Concerns	N	%3-5*	Average
Family Interactions	7	57%	3.9
Arguments	8	63%	3.8
Trust	8	63%	3.8
Overall relationship with child	8	63%	3.8

*% of parents who selected 3, 3.5, 4, 4.5, or 5 on a scale of 1-5, 1 = No Improvement, 3 = Some Improvement, 5 = Resolved

Participant Evaluation of Programming

Participants were asked to evaluate various aspects of programming, including the mentor, the therapist, and the therapy sessions.

Mentoring

One hundred percent of participants felt the mentor, JD Chapman, listened well, was supportive, and used appropriate strategies given their needs (N=10). See all findings in Table 7.

Table 7 Parent Participant Evaluation of Mentor

The Mentor JD	N	%3-5*	Average
listens well.	8	100%	4.9
is supportive.	8	100%	4.9
uses appropriate strategies given my needs.	8	100%	5.0

*% of parents who selected 3, 3.5, 4, 4.5, or 5 on a scale of 1-5, 1 = Strongly Disagree, 5 = Strongly Agree

Therapy Sessions

One-hundred percent of parents felt the therapist, Antionette Miller, listened well (N=64) and was supportive (N=64). Ninety-eight percent felt that she used appropriate strategies given their needs (N=62) over the course of all of the therapy sessions throughout the program. See all findings in Table 8.

Table 8 Parent Participant Evaluation of Therapist

The therapist...	N	%3-5*	Average
listened well.	64	100%	4.8
was supportive.	64	100%	4.8
used appropriate strategies given my needs.	62	98%	4.7

*% of parents who selected 3, 3.5, 4, 4.5, or 5 on a scale of 1-5, 1 = Strongly Disagree, 5 = Strongly Agree

Ninety-nine percent of youth felt the therapist, Antionette Miller, listened well (N=76), and 97% felt that she was both supportive (N=75) and helpful (N=73) throughout the therapy sessions in the program. See all findings in Table 9.

Table 9 Youth Participant Evaluation of the Therapist

The therapist...	N	%3-5*	Average
listened well	76	99%	4.4
was supportive.	75	97%	4.3
was helpful.	73	97%	4.3

*% of youth who selected 3, 3.5, 4, 4.5, or 5 on a scale of 1-5, 1 = Strongly Disagree, 5 = Strongly Agree

Overall, 95% of parents rated the therapy sessions “good”, “very good”, or “excellent”. Over the course of the program, 95% of parents felt that the therapy sessions helped them understand their feelings about the topic they discussed (N=64) and identify strategies/tools to address the topic they discussed (N=64). Slightly fewer participants (91%) felt the therapy session helped them understand how to work with their child to address the topic they discussed (N=64). See all findings in Table 10.

Table 10 Parent Participant Evaluation of the Therapy Session

The therapy session helped me to...	N	%3-5*	Average
understand my feelings about the topic we discussed.	64	95%	4.6
identify strategies/tools to address the topic we discussed.	64	95%	4.6
understand how to work with my child to address the topic we discussed.	64	91%	4.6

*% of parents who selected 3, 3.5, 4, 4.5, or 5 on a scale of 1-5, 1 = Strongly Disagree, 5 = Strongly Agree

Overall, 96% of youth felt the therapy sessions were “good”, “very good” or “excellent”. Over the course of the program, 99% percent of youth felt the therapy session topics were important to them (N=76). Ninety-six percent felt the therapy sessions helped them to both understand their feelings (N=75) and to deal with their stress appropriately (N=74). See all findings in Table 11.

Table 11 Youth Participant Evaluation of the Therapy Session

The therapy session...	N	%3-5*	Average
topic was important to me.	76	96%	4.0
helped me understand my feelings.	75	92%	3.8
helped me learn to deal with my stress appropriately.	74	92%	3.8

*% of youth who selected 3, 3.5, 4, 4.5, or 5 on a scale of 1-5, 1 = Strongly Disagree, 5 = Strongly Agree

Parent Support Workshops

The parent support workshops provided an opportunity for parents to come together to apply their learning from the family therapy settings and to engage with and learn from each other. At parent support groups parents were led in a guided imagery exercises. During this time, they were asked to reflect back to a traumatic experience as a child that have impacted how they parent today. Parents were asked to have a conversation with themselves to forgive their younger self or ask questions that they wished they were brave enough to ask during this time. This activity brought on a flood of emotions.

One of the primary foci of the parent support groups was to work on utilizing effective communication skills. Learning to communicate among each other using techniques such as clarifying questions, assertive communication, expressing thoughts (using “I” statements) reinforce (reward the youth if they respond to you well) mindfulness, appear confident and be open to negotiations. All families were able to show an improvement in communication after utilizing these techniques.

The parent support groups centered on three major themes of *parenting styles, love and attachment, and opioid use/drug overdose*, based on the needs of the families.

Parenting Styles. Parents were educated on the different types of parenting styles. Parents took assessments to better understand their own parenting style and develop a deeper understanding of each style. They then began to understand how to incorporate new parenting techniques as needed. Parents were able to compile a list of expectations and rules that their parents used for them. A lot of these are the same rules that parents are using currently for their youth. Parents were able to identify areas where changes need to be made. This included a need for more accountability, implement curfews, and chores for their youth around the house. Improve communication skills. Allowing the youth to talk more, and respectfully express themselves.

Love & Attachment. All parents attended parent support groups where they learned about different attachment styles and how your attachment style can dictate your current style of parenting. Also identifying at what level of childhood did the feeling of rejection occur for the parent and how to have open communication with the youth on how feeling rejected has impacted their interaction with the Criminal Justice system. Although, parents struggled with learning how attachment styles have impacted their parenting. Many parents became aware of the feelings of detachment their children currently feel.

Opioids/Drug Overdose. Realism Is Loyalty partnered with the RED Project to provide education about the use of opioids and substance use during one of the parent support group sessions. This programming focused on how different tolerances of substances affects the brain and the four areas of anomalies in addiction, including: the survival/reinforcement circuit involving an overactive “go” switch; a damaged or underactive “stop switch”; impaired communication; and what factors make recovery from substances extremely difficult for some. Parents also learned about the different classifications of substances and the signs and symptoms that could potentially point to signs of substance use or addiction in their child.

Participants found the parent support workshops particularly helpful. Parents commented that it was helpful to review the topics from previous therapy sessions together with other parents. They liked how “to the point” the workshops were and opportunity they provided to hear from other parents. One parent commented that it helped them “to do a little soul searching”. Participants found the pamphlets useful. The only recommendations for improvement were to increase the length of the sessions and to offer additional support. See Table 12 for all findings from the parent support workshops.

Table 12 Participant Evaluation of Parent Support Workshops

	N	Parenting Styles		Love & Attachment		Opioids/Drug Overdose	
		%3-5*	Mean	%3-5*	Mean	%3-5*	Mean
understand my feelings about the topic we discussed.	4	100%	4.8	100%	4.8	100%	4.9
learn a new parenting strategy.	4	75%	4.1	100%	4.8	100%	4.9
learn how my actions or decisions may have impacted my child.	4	100%	4.4	100%	4.8	100%	5.0
develop awareness of different ways to interact with my child.	4	75%	4.1	100%	4.8	100%	4.9
I felt safe sharing my experiences.	4	100%	4.9	100%	4.9	100%	4.9
The group environment was supportive.	4	100%	4.9	100%	4.9	100%	5.0
The session was engaging.	4	100%	4.9	100%	4.9	100%	4.9
Overall, the workshop was...	4	100%	4.8	100%	4.9	100%	5.0

*% of parents who selected 3, 3.5, 4, 4.5, or 5 on a scale of 1-5, 1 = Strongly Disagree, 5 = Strongly Agree

Recommendations

The Relatable Parenting pilot program recognized significant success. The strategies utilized by the Realism Is Loyalty staff resonated with the parent and youth participants. Parents demonstrated progress in learning and using strategies that helped them recognize and cope with the generational trauma that was impacting their family dynamics, particularly, the communication and parenting strategies with their child(ren). While parents felt that they were making good progress, they were still actively working to resolve issues plaguing their families when the program ended. Additional time and programming are needed to support parents as they continue to work through these issues. Given this, the following strategies are recommended:

1. Continue to formalize the Relatable Parenting curriculum, based on the lessons learned through the pilot.
2. Identify the depth and scope of activities needed to support parents and their children.

3. Identify the length of time and number of interventions (family therapy sessions, parent support groups, and mentoring activities) needed to help families be able to resolve their conflicts within the duration of the program.
4. Update program evaluation methods to align with revised programming.