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The Strong African American Families Program: Translating Research Into Prevention Programming

We developed and tested the Strong African American Families Program (SAAF), which was designed to prevent underage drinking and early sexual activity among African American adolescents living in the rural South. This program is one of the first to target the needs of this particular population, because most prevention programs have focused on White youths or African Americans living in inner cities. Because rural African Americans are more likely to depend on their families than on any other source of help in times of trouble, we designed SAAF to be a family-centered program. Mothers and their 11-year-olds from 172 families attended seven weekly meetings held at community facilities, while another 150 families received leaflets in the mail that dealt with development during early adolescence. We focused on 11-year-olds because at this age young people begin to become preoccupied with their friends' acceptance. One of the program's goals was to help parents learn how to continue guiding their children while accommodating the children's need to become independent.

Each SAAF meeting lasted two hours. During the first hour, mothers and young people took part in separate skill-building sessions. Mothers focused on ways to become involved in their children's lives, discipline their children consistently, and keep track of what their children are doing. They also learned how to communicate with their children about sex, set clear expectations for their children to avoid underage alcohol use, and help their children develop positive identities as African Americans. The 11-year-olds took part in activities designed to communicate negative attitudes toward underage drinking, early sexual activity, and young people who take part in these

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behaviors. Other activities encouraged them to resist peer pressure, develop goals for the future, and accept their parents' influence. During the second hour, mothers and young people got together to practice the skills they learned in their separate sessions. Both groups of families filled out questionnaires related to these issues before the program began and three months after it ended.

In families who participated in the SAAF program, both mothers and young people became more skilled in the behaviors they learned in the meetings. In families who received leaflets, mothers and young people became less skilled in these areas. We believe that participating in SAAF interrupted a reduction in parents' involvement and communication with their children in response to the young people's independence seeking. The program also taught both parents and young people skills that will protect the youths from harmful behaviors at a time when these issues are particularly important in their development.

Summarized from Child Development, Vol. 75, Issue 3, *The Strong African American Families Program: Translating Research Into Prevention Programming* by G. H. Brody, V. McBride Murry, M. Gerrard, F. X. Gibbons, V. Molgaard, L. McNair, A. C. Brown, T. A. Wills, R. L. Spoth, Z. Luo, Y. Chen, and E. Neubaum-Carlan. Copyright 2004 The Society for Research in Child Development, Inc. All rights reserved.

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