

ONE SIZE DOES NOT FIT ALL: HOW A MODEL PROGRAM CAN BE ADAPTED TO WORK FOR DIFFERENT POPULATIONS^[9507]

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Introduction

As model programs that are theory-driven and well-evaluated are implemented more frequently, they need to be adapted to local circumstances, but at the same time maintain a delicate balance between program fidelity and adaptation.

Families and Schools Together (FAST) is a model program of the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) that has been implemented in hundreds of sites since its inception in 1988. Although the program has been evaluated since 1988, it has used a consistent and updated evaluation design in all program sites since 2002. This paper will examine the findings of these evaluations for different populations and discuss how FAST balances program fidelity and program adaptation in order to make the program work for different populations.

The Dilemma: Balancing Program Adaptation and Program Fidelity

The Center for Substance Abuse Prevention (2002) defines program fidelity as “the degree of fit between the developer-defined components of a substance abuse prevention program, and its actual implementation in a given organizational or community setting” (p. 4). Program adaptation is defined as—

Deliberate or accidental modification of the program, including (a) deletions or additions (enhancements) of program components, (b) modifications in the nature of the components that are included, (c) changes in the manner or intensity of administration of program components called for in the program manual, curriculum, or component analysis, or (d) cultural and other modifications required by local circumstances” (p. 4).

Many research-based prevention programs have undergone experimental studies in which their effectiveness has been evaluated. Often, these programs have proven highly effective under research conditions, but they have exhibited less dependable outcomes in the real world. These diluted outcomes are frequently the result of liberties taken during program implementation. Some research suggests that as few as 20 percent of programs’ core components are actually implemented (Gottfredson et al, 2000). When core components are compromised, outcomes will also be compromised. However, one of the dilemmas of programs that are designed to be implemented with fidelity in order to maintain their effectiveness is that they often do not leave room for individual program implementation sites to adapt the program to their population and local culture.

What is “Families and Schools Together”?

Families and Schools Together (FAST) is an award-winning, collaborative prevention and parent involvement program designed to address three problems: alcohol and drug abuse, violence and delinquency, and school drop out. Its strategy is to reduce causal factors related to those problems by starting with young children using a family-based model. Children from kindergarten to fifth grade are targeted for Elementary School FAST. Invitation to all children in these grade levels is recommended, though not required. Some of

the targeted children may display behavior problems (at school and at home), poor self-esteem, short attention span, and hyperactivity. Children invited to participate may already be involved in school-sponsored programs such as D.A.R.E. and G.R.E.A.T.

The core of the program involves eight weekly multifamily meetings. Usually the meetings are held in a school, but other community locales, such as churches, and community agency offices work as well. During the meetings, positive interaction experiences for families are structured and facilitated by a collaborative team that consists of at least four members: a parent partner, a school partner, a community-based mental health partner, and a community-based substance abuse partner.

Families graduate from the program at the end of eight weeks and then participate in monthly follow-up FASTWORKS meetings for two years. The program develops a support network for the family, empowering the parent to be the primary prevention agent for his or her own child.

One of the defining features of FAST is that it collaborates with schools, parents, and community-based agencies. These collaborations offer opportunities to strengthen family, school, and community bonds. A collaborative team runs the eight-week program. Parent graduate volunteers run the two-year follow-up meetings with the collaborative team providing back-up support. Professionals become familiar to the whole family in this fun and informal setting. Should a family require services at a later time, the familiarity makes doing so easier and more comfortable.

The FAST program goals are to—

1. Enhance family functioning
 - a. Strengthen the parent-child relationship in specific, focused ways
 - b. Empower the parents to become the primary prevention agents for their own children
2. Prevent the target child from experiencing school failure
 - a. Improve the child's behavior and performance in school, both short-term and long-term
 - b. Empower the parents in their role as partners in the educational process
 - c. Increase the child and family's feelings of affiliation toward their school
3. Prevent substance abuse by the child and family
 - a. Increase the family's knowledge and awareness of substance abuse, and the impact of substance abuse upon child development
 - b. Link the family to appropriate assessment and treatment services, as needed
4. Reduce the stress that parents and children experience from daily life situations
 - a. Offer on-going opportunities for building social support among parents
 - b. Link the family to appropriate community resources and services, as needed
 - c. Build the personal effectiveness and self-esteem of each family member

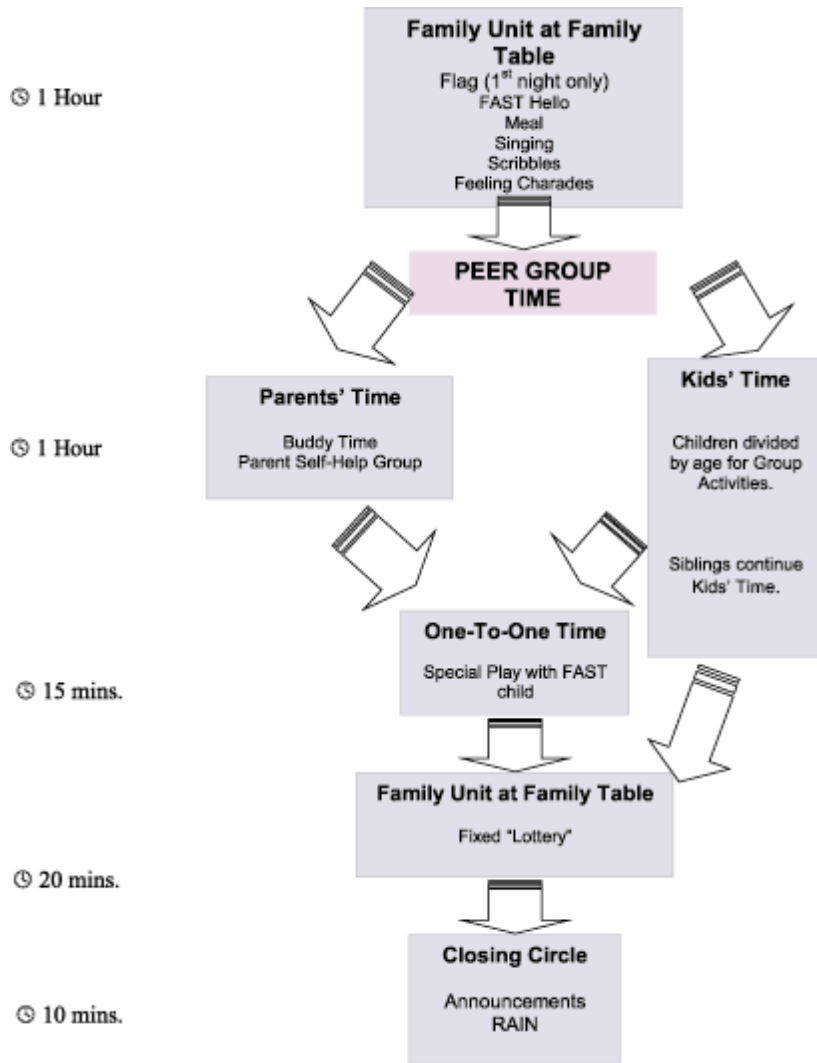
A Typical Fast Session and Examples of Adaptations

The following core components are required for the FAST program. Except for the Family Flag, these session-level core requirements have to be repeated at every session. See Figure 1 for a typical FAST session.

Fast Traditions

The same traditions such as the FAST Hello (families greeting each other), FAST song and music, Circle, and Rain occur each week. Circle refers to families standing in a circle, and making announcements. Rain is also an activity that is done in a circle where one person takes the lead and other follow the movement of the leader.

Figure 1. Typical FAST session



These tradition-oriented activities are frequently adapted by groups. For example, African-American groups have selected music with religious meaning, and some groups have selected rap music. FAST cycles implemented in Hawaii have adapted the FAST Hello, and changed it to a greeting that is practiced on the islands.

Family flag

During the first FAST meeting, each family sitting at its family table makes a family flag. A family photo will be taken and attached to the flag. Each week, the family puts the family flag at its table. The flag represents the family, and parents are given an opportunity to be in charge of making the flag. FAST implementations with Hispanic families have allowed families to integrate the flag of their country of origin into their family flag.

Family interaction time

Interaction activities, such as Scribbles and Feeling Charades, are played each week. Parents are in charge of each family activity, and the family spends between 20 and 30 minutes each week in these activities. These core activities may not be adapted.

One-on-one time or special play

The focal child and parent spend a minimum of 15 minutes engaged in designated play. The play time is led by the child, and parents follow the lead of the child. Parents are encouraged to do 15 minutes of special play every day.

The toys used for special play may be adapted, although it is recommended that the adaptations be as simple as possible. The focus of this activity is not on the playing but on the interaction between parent and child. Typically the box of toys is a box of “junk,” that is, it contains odds and ends that allow children to use their imaginations. But special play can also be done without toys.

Buddy time

Adults get 15 minutes of one-on-one time. Single parents pair up with other single parents and take turns talking uninterrupted about what is on their minds. Partners pair up with each other. Each person decides what he or she wants to talk about. This core activity may not be adapted.

Parent group

All parents meet for about 45 minutes to talk about whatever they want. The parent team member and the community-based team member participate but provide minimal facilitation. The FAST school partner is not allowed to attend the group meeting, as school related issues may be discussed. Parents frequently discuss issues related to academic performance and discipline and other issues related to child rearing. This core activity may not be adapted.

Family meal

Families who win the lottery are responsible for the meal for the entire group the following week. The host family gets money to buy food, plans the menu, and prepares a meal for the other families and the FAST team. This gives the family who has won the lottery the week before an opportunity to reciprocate.

Families can decide what they want to cook. For example, Native American families have cooked traditional foods and then explained the food and the background to children. Families who cook their native foods can showcase their country and gain an opportunity to connect with other parents. In other program implementations, some parents decided to make time to pray before eating.

Lottery

Every family wins the lottery once during the eight week program. The winning family is showcased, and the lottery basket includes gifts for the whole family. Families who win the lottery are responsible for preparing the meal the next week. The lottery is used primarily as an incentive for program attendance and retention, but the lottery also serves to teach children to delay gratification and trust their parents. Parents know that each family will win the lottery and can assure their child that they will win at some point during the program.

The content of the lottery basket may be changed to reflect the culture of the recipient. Team members will buy gifts tailored to each family, for as they conduct home visits, they get a sense of what different family members would like. In addition, the team members ask the parents what the child(ren) would like.

How Is FAST Evaluated?

Every cycle of FAST must be evaluated. Sites use a standardized set of evaluation tools that, after being completed by parents, are sent to the FAST National Training and Evaluation Center where they are analyzed. Each site receives a report describing the findings.

The FAST evaluation uses a repeated measure non-experimental design with two independent raters. In the elementary school model, parents and teachers are the typical raters. Each rater completes a survey measure designed specifically to measure FAST goals. Parents answer questions about social relationships, social support, involvement in their child's education, family environment, and the child's social strengths and difficulties. Teachers complete a survey about the child's strengths and difficulties and the parent's involvement in the school. Responses provided before and after the program are paired to determine the level of change that has occurred during the FAST program. Demographic and participant satisfaction information is also collected from parents.

The outcome evaluation design was developed by Dr. Lynn McDonald and Dr. Stephen Billingham for the Statewide FAST Initiative in Wisconsin. The outcome evaluation reporting structure was developed in 1991 by Dr. Lynn McDonald and Dr. Thomas Sayger for the Center for Substance Abuse Prevention (CSAP) in 1991.

The evaluation tools include the following:

Family Environment Scale (FES)-Family Relationships Index (Moos and Moos 1986)

The Family Relationship Index of the Family Environment Scale is a 27-item scale that rates the domains of cohesion, expressiveness, and conflict. A score for total relationship can be obtained by adding the cohesion and expressiveness scores, then subtracting the conflict score. The FES has demonstrated good reliability and validity and provides standardized norms and scores. The cohesion scale of the FES measures the degree of commitment, help, and support that family members provide for one another. The higher this score, the better in terms of overall family functioning. "Distressed" families score lower than "normal" families. The expressiveness scale of the FES measures the extent to which family members are encouraged to act openly and to express their feelings directly. The higher this score, the better in terms of family communication. Distressed families score lower than normal families. The conflict scale of the FES measures the amount of openly expressed anger, aggression, and conflict among family members. The higher this score, the more common the level of disturbance in the family. Again, distressed families score higher than normal families.

Social Support (Sherbourne and Stewart 1991)

This instrument includes 11 items that measure four dimensions of social support: emotional, tangible, affectionate, and total support. These dimensions measure the support one would get if help were needed in everyday life. Scores for each item range from 0 to 3. A higher score corresponds to stronger social support. Emotional support is defined as the expression of positive affect, empathic understanding, and the encouragement of expressions of feelings. Affectionate support involves the expression of love and affection, which is seen as very beneficial to health outcomes of the chronically ill. Tangible support is characterized as providing material aid or behavioral assistance. Total support is a sum of these three dimensions. Reliability of the measure was tested on 2,987 respondents. Reliability of the scale as a whole was 0.97. The three subscales ranged from 0.91 to 0.96.

Reciprocal Support with Other Parents (McDonald and Moberg 2001)

This measure determines the level of support on two dimensions. Parents may receive support from other parents, such as help with babysitting, carpooling assistance, sharing feelings, and getting together

socially. They may also provide support to other parents in these same areas. Scores can range from 0 to 15 on each subscale, with a higher score corresponding to more support.

Parental Involvement in Education (Epstein and Salinas 1993)

This widely used scale rates the level of parental involvement in their child's school. The questions look at parental school involvement, parent initiated contact with teachers, and school initiated contact with the parent. Reliability for each area ranges from 0.70 to 0.76. Scores for each of the parental contact and involvement items range from 0 to 4. Three additional questions, developed by Lynn McDonald, FAST program founder, ask about the parents' impressions of the school effectiveness and their school involvement, and the scores range from 0 to 3. These items may be most appropriate as predictor variables for understanding responses to other questions.

Strength and Difficulties Questionnaire (Goodman 1997)

The Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ) is a behavioral questionnaire about children. Both parents and teachers complete this measure, which consists of 25 items that address strengths (prosocial behavior) and difficulties (emotional issues, conduct problems, peer relationships, and hyperactivity problems). Scores for the prosocial and individual difficulties subscales can range from 0 to 10. A higher score for strengths corresponds to positive behavior. A lower score for difficulties corresponds to a reduction in difficult behavior. The total difficulties subscale is the sum of the individual difficulties subscale and scores can range from 0 to 40, with a lower score indicating a reduction in difficult behavior. Five additional questions are used to assess the impact that the *FAST* child's difficulties have on his or her everyday life. A score of 0 corresponds to no or very little impact, whereas a score of 1 or 2 indicates moderate or high impact on the child and family.

Self-Efficacy Scale (Sherer, et al, 1983; Coleman, et al, 2000)

The Self-Efficacy Scale, which is completed by parents, measures self-efficacy expectations dependent on the parent's past experiences and on tendencies to attribute success to skill as opposed to chance. The questions in this scale were adapted to measure the parent's general sense of personal effectiveness. A factor analysis done by the authors yielded a subscale called the general self-efficacy subscale. The FAST survey uses 16 items from the subscale that address the relationship between self-efficacy and general tasks. Other questions, asking about social relationships and self-efficacy, assess the parent's beliefs about their ability to make and keep friendships. Scores range from 1 to 5, where 5 indicates the highest level of efficacy. Seven items developed by Coleman et al. (2000) measure parental nurturance effectiveness.

Social Relationships Questionnaire (McDonald, et al, 2002)

This questionnaire was specifically designed for the FAST program. It measures the relationship that parents have with their FAST child. It also measures social relationships with other people and community agencies. Eight items measure the relationship that parents have with their FAST child and scores on each item range from 1 to 10. Eleven items measure the relationship that parents have with other people and community agencies, and scores range from 1 to 10. A higher score on all of the items corresponds to stronger relationships.

Families and Schools Together-Program (FAST) Evaluation by Family (McDonald and Billingham 1988)

This open-ended questionnaire affords families an opportunity to explain how the program has affected their lives. Each family rates their relationships with FAST team members and other FAST participants on a scale of 1 to 10. In addition, parents rate their satisfaction with the program on a scale of 1 to 10.

Does FAST Work for Diverse Populations?

Selected scales will be examined in this section. For the purpose of this paper, we will focus on parent data.

Improving family cohesion and family relationships is an important outcome for the FAST program. This outcome is assessed with the Family Relationship Index of the Family Environment Scale. The Family Relationship Index indicates that all four groups improved in the areas of family cohesion and total relationship score. Families also showed decreased conflict scores. Expressiveness improved for African-American, white and Hispanic/Latino families, but not for Native American families. See Table 1.

Table 1 Pre- and post-scores for the Family Environment Scale

	African-American	Native American	White	Hispanic/Latino
Cohesion	N=376	N=43	N=350	N=300
Pre	6.89	6.45	6.64	6.7
Post	7.63***	7.05*	7.42***	7.21***
Expressiveness	N=375	N=43	N=349	N=302
Pre	5.07	5.25	5.75	5.18
Post	5.46***	5.62 ^{ns}	6.09***	5.34*
Conflict	N=375	N=43	N=350	N=300
Pre	3.04	3.7	3.54	3.31
Post	2.14***	2.75***	2.88***	2.81***
Total	N=374	N=43	N=349	N=298
Pre	8.9	7.99	8.84	8.55
Post	10.93***	9.92***	10.63***	9.73***

* p < 0.05; **p < 0.01; ***p < 0.001; ^{ns} Not significant

Increased social support is an important outcome for the FAST program and is assessed with the Reciprocal Support Scale as well as the Social Support Scale. We find that all four groups report significant increases in the support they receive and in the support they provide to others. However, on the Social Support Scale, scores for tangible, affectionate, emotional, and total support do not indicate a significant improvement for Native Americans.

Table 2. Pre- and post-scores for the Reciprocal Support Scale

	African-American	Native American	White	Hispanic/Latino
Support provided	N=370	N=42	N=351	N=285
Pre	1.28	1.57	1.15	1.65
Post	2.37***	2.02*	1.95***	2.26***
Support received	N=371	N=42	N=350	N=295
Pre	1.17	1.17	0.96	1.61
Post	2.34***	1.83**	1.78***	2.30***

* p < 0.05; **p < 0.01; ***p < 0.001; ^{ns} Not significant

Table 3. Pre- and post-scores for the Social Support Scale

	African-American	Native American	White	Hispanic/Latino
Tangible support	N=380	N=42	N=354	N=304
Pre	2.1	1.96	1.99	1.75
Post	2.35***	1.90 ^{ns}	2.08***	1.88**
Affectionate support	N=379	N=42	N=353	N=304
Pre	2.3	2.09	2.26	2.3
Post	2.57***	2.17 ^{ns}	2.38***	2.39*
Emotional support	N=379	N=42	N=354	N=303
Pre	2.22	2.14	2.16	1.99
Post	2.48***	1.98 ^{ns}	2.24*	2.10**
Total support	N=380	N=42	N=354	N=303
Pre	2.18	2.04	2.1	1.98
Post	2.44***	1.98 ^{ns}	2.20***	2.09**

* p < 0.05; **p < 0.01; ***p < 0.001; ^{ns} Not significant

One of the main goals of the FAST program is to improve the relationship between parents and teachers and to increase parents' involvement in school. Findings indicate that parental involvement in school improved for all four groups.

Table 4. Pre- and post-scores for the Parental Involvement in Education Scale

	African-American	Native American	White	Hispanic/Latino
Parent School Involvement	N=375	N=41	N=345	N=293
Pre	2.19	2.39	2.15	2.15
Post	2.64***	2.64*	2.34***	2.48***
Parent to School Contact	N=371	N=41	N=340	N=293
Pre	1.37	1.22	1.28	1.4
Post	1.64***	1.67**	1.41**	1.71***
School to Parent Contact	N=372	N=41	N=345	N=291
Pre	1.43	0.96	1.11	1.44
Post	1.55*	1.38*	1.28**	1.72***
Total Parent Involvement in School	N=369	N=41	N=332	N=285
Pre	1.69	1.58	1.56	1.69
Post	2.00***	1.97***	1.73***	2.01***

* p < 0.05; **p < 0.01; ***p < 0.001; ^{ns} Not significant

At the end of the program, parents are asked to rate their relationships with other parents and the team members and their overall satisfaction with the program. Program satisfaction is essential in participant retention and provides a sense of how much the participants enjoyed the program, above and beyond any benefits they may have experienced. Ratings for relationships with parents and team members and for satisfaction are high across the four groups.

Table 5. Relationship and program satisfaction scores

Relationship Rating (1=poor, 10=excellent)	African-American	Native American	White	Hispanic/Latino
Relationship with other parents	(N=368) 8.48	(N=38) 7.71	(N=342) 7.38	(N=300) 8.27
Relationship with Parent Partner	(N=365) 8.77	(N=37) 7.43	(N=331) 7.90	(N=282) 8.35
Relationship with School Partner	(N=361) 8.71	(N=37) 8.05	(N=332) 7.78	(N=280) 8.26
Relationship with Community Agency Partner	(N=352) 8.41	(N=36) 7.47	(N=328) 7.63	(N=267) 8.07
How satisfied with FAST	(N=233) 9.28	(N=30) 9.03	(N=200) 8.55	(N=270) 9.40

How FAST Maintains Program Integrity

FAST helps implementation sites balance program fidelity with adaptation by maintaining a strong training structure that provides oversight and feedback. Training includes training the FAST team, three site visits during the eight-week program implementation, a required evaluation component, plus technical assistance as requested by the team.

Each FAST team member receives two days of training by a certified FAST trainer prior to implementing the program. As the team implements the program, the site receives three site visits by its certified FAST trainer who attends three FAST sessions, observes, and provides the team with feedback. During these site visits, the trainer observes whether the core components are implemented as designed and notes anything that may compromise program fidelity. The trainer is available for additional technical assistance by request. In addition to the first-hand observations by the trainer, each site is required to do an evaluation of its program cycle.

In order to become a certified FAST site, the site has to graduate a minimum of five families (families have to attend six out of eight meetings), submit matching pre- and post tests for five families, and have satisfactory trainer reports. If the team retains the majority of team members for the next program implementation, no additional training is required. However, if half or more of the original team members leave the team, the team as a whole has to repeat the two-day training.

Limitations of These Data

Because this study has a number of limitations, it should be viewed as a preliminary examination of whether families across racial and ethnic groups achieve the desired FAST outcomes. The limitations are as follows:

1. Data were examined by race and ethnicity regardless of the make-up of individual cycles. Individual program cycles may include a very diverse group of people or may be homogenous. However, regardless of racial make-up, each FAST team is required to match the racial make-up of the FAST families. That is, if all FAST families in a program cycle are African-American then all FAST team members have to be African-American.
2. This is a convenience sample that is based on families who graduated from the program, with graduation based on attending six out of eight program sessions.
3. The sample size for Native American families is relatively small compared to those of the other three groups, which may explain some of the non-significant findings.

Discussion

Families and Schools Together has been implemented in over 800 communities in the U. S., and it has a long standing tradition of evaluation. Evaluations from more than 1,000 parents who participated in FAST with their families indicate that, for the most part, families of diverse ethnic backgrounds will benefit from the program. Even though core activities have to be implemented as designed, the program gives enough freedom to individual sites to make the program into something that feels right to families. Adaptations are surprisingly simple and tend to include what is familiar: familiar foods, familiar music, familiar greetings, and familiar language. The success of FAST may be attributed to a strict quality implementation protocol, an insistence on core components being implemented with fidelity, and a strong training structure. However, another less tangible component is that FAST is based on a universal value that is important to all families: belonging to a happy and healthy family and community. FAST seems to provide families with both by creating time each week to spend with one's family and new friends.

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