

Understanding how to deliver an evidence-based and evidence-informed program with quality and adherence to the developer's original model is important to ensure the desired outcomes.

### WHAT IS FIDELITY?

Fidelity is the degree to which the following occurs:

- The program curriculum is implemented as designed by the program developer;
- The delivery model that was tested in the research is utilized; and
- A program is implemented with a commitment to quality coordination.

Preserving the core curriculum components and delivery mechanisms that made the original program effective has a direct impact on the ability to achieve the outcomes demonstrated through rigorous evaluation.

### WHY IS MODEL ADHERENCE IMPORTANT?

Delivery staff are often committed to aspects of quality delivery, like ensuring that the participants are comfortable and engaged. Promoting their awareness of the importance of model adherence can further strengthen their delivery and impact. Program staff or facilitators should understand the theory of change or logic model behind the program's design. When delivery staff understand why program components are designed in a specific manner, what underlying risk and protective factors are targeted, and what the expected short and long-term outcomes are, they are more likely to deliver a program with an understanding of the intended purpose of the core concepts. This leads to increased motivation, more conscientious delivery, and emphasis on the program elements that promote participant change.

### STARTING SMART!

Successful program implementation begins when selecting a program. From the start, carefully review program options and select a program that does the following:

- Matches the underlying risk factors that have been identified from local data sources;
- Demonstrates effectiveness in impacting the identified short- and long-term outcomes;
- Is appropriate for and will appeal to the target population;
- Utilizes recruitment or referral mechanisms that are appropriate for the target community;
- Includes curriculum materials that are culturally appropriate to the target audience;
- Exhibits effectiveness when delivered in the planned setting;
- Corresponds to the amount of time committed for coordination and delivery (participant dosage);
- Incorporates a solid training infrastructure and implementation supports; and
- Coordinates the skill sets and qualifications of the delivery staff.

## WHAT IS ADAPTATION?

Making changes to a program's original design during implementation is known as adaptation. For example, an organization implementing a school-based program might shorten lessons or reduce the number of lessons to fit the program into a school's daily schedule or calendar year. This can alter the dosage or specified amount of the program that is necessary to result in participant change. Adaptations can be implemented but should be planned, should be thought out (e.g., using the program's logic model), and should not alter the core components of the program.

## WHAT IS PROGRAM DRIFT?

Program drift occurs when small changes to a program's delivery are made over time, and these changes are not made in a planned and carefully thought out manner. For example, a facilitator who delivers a program soon after training may be careful to implement as instructed. However, as his or her familiarity with the curriculum and his or her delivery comfort level increases, he or she may make changes to fit his or her preferred facilitation style, or he or she may begin interjecting comments or opinions that are not consistent with the core concepts. As the number of adaptations increases, the likelihood that the researched outcomes will be achieved may decrease.

## IMPLEMENTING AS DESIGNED BY THE DEVELOPER IS KEY TO ACHIEVING PARTICIPANT OUTCOMES!

Adaptations that eliminate parts of a program's content, shorten the duration, or decrease the intensity of a program may reduce the expected outcomes or lead to unintended or harmful impacts. If modifications are being considered, the program developer should be consulted, or the alteration should be considered in terms of the theory of change. The following adaptations may be adjustable:

- Culturally appropriate metaphors and language;
- Images that reflect the program's participants;
- Activities that do not fit or are offensive to the culture or need to be adjusted for persons with disabilities; and
- Updating statistical information.

Adaptations in which developer or professional (i.e., researchers, content experts, and technical assistance providers) consultation is warranted include the following:

- Reducing the dosage, such as reducing the number of lessons or the length of sessions;
- Adding or removing core curriculum elements, such as lessons, activities, or topics;
- Decreasing opportunities for participant engagement, such as removing discussions or skill practice activities;
- Changing the theoretical approach or program goals; and
- Eliminating the delivery of key concepts or messages.



## STRATEGIES TO MONITOR FIDELITY AND PROMOTE PROGRAM

- Review the logic model to identify points for data collection. Consult with the program developer to learn about available, recommended evaluation tools.
- Monitor results to determine if the expected participant outcomes are being realized. If working with Military Families, the Clearinghouse has Implementation Specialists available to assist with program implementation. Please contact us for more information!
- Share the evaluation results with delivery staff.
- Conduct regular reviews of the program model and curriculum content with staff to diminish program drift.
- Conduct fidelity assessments or observations of delivery. Provide feedback to delivery staff to promote facilitation growth and guide future model adherence.

## REFERENCES

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*The Clearinghouse has Technical Assistance (TA) Specialists who are available to help by offering support and guidance through the program selection, implementation, and evaluation process. These TA Specialists are available from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. EST/EDT Monday through Friday. Use the information below to contact the Clearinghouse!*

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