

Many programs intend to improve outcomes for participants. While some programs are effective, some fall short of their goals. Using evidence-based programs increases the likelihood that program outcomes will be achieved.

What is an Evidence-Based Program (EBP)?

An **Evidence-Based Program** demonstrates significant impact on outcomes of interest through the application of rigorous scientific research methods. An EBP:

1. Has developed content based on theory-driven strategies and practices;
2. Includes a manual that outlines the program's goals and objectives and describes how the parts of the program, the components, should be delivered;
3. *Repeatedly and consistently* demonstrates significant outcomes (e.g., a decrease in child abuse behaviors, or an increase in the use of stress management skills);
4. Is delivered formally or informally by a trained professional in an organized and coherent manner; and
5. Applies rigorous scientific research methods (i.e., a research study that utilizes a randomized control trial (RCT) or quasi-experimental design).

Why use EBPs?

It is important to utilize EBPs because using programs that have been shown to yield positive outcomes is vital for participant success.

Utilizing EBPs can assist in the following ways:

- Securing Organizational Funding- Many federal, state, and private organizations mandate that only EBPs be utilized in order to receive funding.
- Creating Organizational and Staff Buy-in- Developing buy-in creates and encourages confidence in facilitators, and, consequently, they believe that what they are doing is working and will make a difference, which can lead to program implementation success.
- Focusing on Resources that are Most Important- Professionals focus on the use of resources that are related to positive outcomes, which allows for greater efficiency (e.g., the utilization of education transition strategies, education plans, and student portfolios in prevention programs have been found to positively impact later academic performance among youth).

Common Components of EBPs

EBPs share some common components that have been identified throughout the research literature. Nation and Colleagues (2003) conducted a review to identify the common characteristics among effective universal and selected prevention programs that focus on risky youth behaviors. They identified nine principle characteristics or components associated with effective prevention programs:

1. Comprehensive- programs that include multiple components and are implemented across multiple settings.
2. Varied Teaching Methods- programs that use interactive instruction and hands-on experiences that increase participant skill development.
3. Sufficient Dosage- programs that provide enough of the intervention to produce the desired effects and provide follow-up sessions to maintain effects, if necessary.
4. Theory Driven- programs that are conceptually driven by theory, and are based on empirical research.
5. Positive Relationships- programs that promote strong relationships with adults and peers.
6. Appropriately-timed- programs that are delivered at a time when they will have the most impact for the target audience (e.g., delivering prevention and early intervention programs to younger children at risk improves the chances of producing better socioemotional and academic outcomes in school aged children).
7. Socioculturally Relevant- programs that match the cultural beliefs and practices of the target audience.
8. Outcome Evaluation- programs that consistently and systematically evaluate program outcomes.
9. Well-Trained Staff- program facilitators who provide adequate training and guidance to staff.

What to Look for in an EBP?

- ✓ Does the program have scientific evidence that demonstrates its effectiveness?
- ✓ Has the program been evaluated in a controlled scientific study with a population that is similar to the intended program population?
- ✓ How many evaluations have been conducted?
- ✓ Did those evaluations utilize research designs with methodological rigor (e.g., used a RCT design, validated measures, and monitored program implementation)?
- ✓ Have there been external evaluations or independent replications (i.e., an evaluation conducted by persons who have no relationship or association with the organization or program being evaluated) conducted that produce significant results?



REFERENCES

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The Clearinghouse for Military Family Readiness at Penn State (Clearinghouse) has reviewed the research of over 1,200 programs that focus on diverse topic areas, and these programs have been placed on the Clearinghouse's Continuum of Evidence. To learn more about program placements (i.e., Effective-RCT, Effective-Quasi, Promising, Unclear +, Unclear Null, Unclear -, and Ineffective) and the review criteria used, please visit: <https://www.continuum.militaryfamilies.psu.edu/about>

The Clearinghouse has Technical Assistance Specialists available, as well as tools and resources to assist in the program selection process. Please use the information below to contact these Specialists or other members of the Clearinghouse staff!

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