Study: Parenting program lowers child-abuse injuries, foster placements
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(Columbia, SC) - A system of parenting programs widely available in nine counties across South Carolina has been shown effective in preventing child maltreatment and reducing associated measures of injury and foster placement.

A study, funded by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) through the University of South Carolina, shows that the Triple P - Positive Parenting Program has improved the lives of many families by providing proven parenting information and support.

"This study is important for a number of reasons, but primarily because the Triple P system of interventions appeared to prevent growth of child maltreatment rates in the counties in which it was implemented," said Dr. Cheri Shapiro, Project Director for Building Connections, the program through the university that provides Triple P training and parenting information. "The study also showed that child out-of-home placements and maltreatment injuries in these same areas both decreased."

Triple P, founded by Dr. Matthew Sanders in Queensland, Australia, offers suggestions and ideas to help parents build positive relationships with their children. Grounded in 25 years of research, Triple P gives parents simple strategies to handle common behavior problems and prevent future difficulties.

Triple P has been used in nine counties around South Carolina, including Kershaw County, since 2003. Professionals who work with families with young children, like Wanda Montes, program coordinator for Kershaw County First Steps, were trained to use Triple P with the families they serve. Montes has witnessed, firsthand, how the program affects families.

"The families that we have provided Triple P support to have gotten a good perspective on how they can interact with their children in a positive way. That strengthens their families," she said. "Before Triple P, there wasn't a real, concrete family support curriculum we needed to give families concrete tips on what to do for this or that behavior. I've found that I can't even think of looking for any other type of program because it's always given me the answers that I'm looking for."

Montes isn't surprised to hear about the impact Triple P can have on families in a community, because she has seen the program reduce the stress and frustration that often accompany parenting.

"When parents are given the right support and step back a minute and think about the situation and understand their children better, they can control things in a different way. If they're not thinking and losing control of the situation, bad things can happen. It's a crucial element in preventing child abuse and neglect," she observed.

Shapiro is gratified to know that Triple P has been effective for the families touched by the intervention.

"For me, the fact that we might have spared just one child and family the anguish of separation, injury, or harm would have been enough, but that we have been able to do this for a larger number of families truly speaks to the power of large-scale prevention efforts," she said.

More than 20 providers have been trained in Triple P in Kershaw County and are available to help families. Through these providers, Triple P has achieved a positive impact in the community.

"This level of impact could not have been felt without the investment of time and energy on the part of the hundreds of individuals and organizations who work daily to improve the lives of South Carolina's youngest citizens and their families," Shapiro said.