

# FAMILY AND COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT EVALUATION REPORT<sup>1</sup>

## PS: *It Works!* Parenting Skills Workshop Series<sup>©</sup>, 2005-2019<sup>2</sup>

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### ABSTRACT

Parenting Skills Workshop Series<sup>©</sup> (PSWS)<sup>2</sup> participants learn skills to replace impulsive behaviors with rational behaviors and ineffective or hurtful parenting styles with effective, child-friendly parenting skills. In program evaluations from 2005-2018, participants (n=618) reported statistically significant improvement in their ability to use the five foundational parenting skills, their confidence in parenting, and their satisfaction with their families. Parents reported increased ability to try out different approaches and deal with challenging situations.

Evaluation data, collected with a post/pre, self-report instrument, included 12 items measured by a four-point Likert scale. Mean scores and t-test statistics were used to analyze the data. Variations between sub-sample groups and the quest for a pre/post design await further study to build on the current quantitative evaluation and a qualitative program theory evaluation (*Building Parenting Skills: A Program Evaluation*, Tischler; Cornell Community and Rural Development Institute, Vol 8. No. 1, 2000; see Appendix B).

An extended follow-up 2008 focus group study (n=11) found that participants reported increases in their self-esteem, ability to use self-control, and increases in individual awareness of their behavior and how it affects their children. A grounded theory analysis was utilized with the transcription of the 30-minute interview (See Appendix A).

### A BRIEF OVERVIEW OF THE PROGRAM

The *Parenting Skills Workshop Series<sup>©</sup> (PSWS)* was created in 1986 in response to a Tompkins County family court judge who identified a community need: families facing charges of child neglect and abuse required parenting education and support to break recurrent cycles of maltreatment.

The goal of *PSWS* is to replace impulsive behaviors with rational behaviors and ineffective or hurtful parenting styles with effective, child-friendly parenting skills.

Program developers collaborated with experts across a wide spectrum of fields to integrate theories on education, social-work, child development and family development, as well as research in the field of education by Arnold Goldstein (*Changing the Abusive Parent*, Goldstein et al, Champaign, IL.: Research Press, 1985) on changing abusive behaviors and interpersonal communication. Improved communication skills, which are considered important tools for self-empowerment and development, became the central focus of this strength-based educational program.

A theory-based evaluation (Tischler, 2000, see Appendix B) found consistency among program theory, design and implementation and reported outcomes.

The five foundational skills, **Encouragement**, **Can Do**, **Choices**, **Self-Control** and **Respecting Feelings** are presented, practiced and reinforced through a structured-learning curriculum, grounded in adult learning theory. *PSWS* is co-facilitated by two trained parenting educators. Groups of 8-15 people meet for eight two-hour sessions, typically once a week. Participants in *PSWS* groups can be court-mandated or voluntary, agency or self-referred.

### AN INTRODUCTION TO THE PARENTING SKILLS

The *PSWS* consists of five foundational parenting skills:

**Encouragement** helps children feel good about who they are and what they do, and helps parents discover and value their children's evolving strengths;

**Can Do** teaches parents how to redirect children's behavior. Children are able to change unacceptable behaviors to acceptable ones; parents gain a constructive limit-setting technique;

**Choices** builds on the *Encouragement* and *Can Do* skills to build cooperation between parent and child. Parents help children learn how to make decisions that affect their lives;

**Self-Control** helps parents avoid acting hurtfully toward their children. Parents learn to manage their response to strong emotions; children learn by example how to handle their feelings;

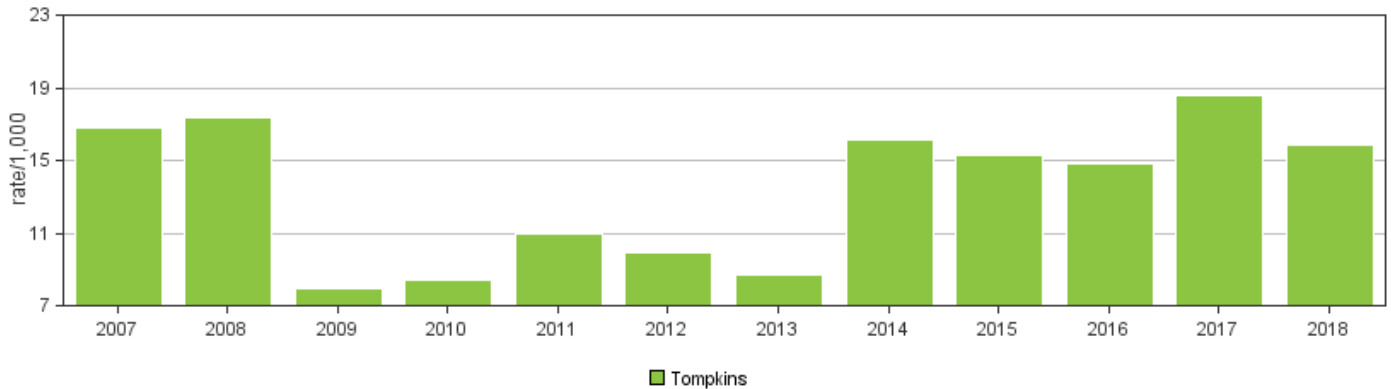
**Respecting Feelings** helps parents and children understand and accept a wide range of emotions. It is an empathy-building skill with which parents show that they respect their children.

# PSWS IN CONTEXT: TRENDS IN CHILD ABUSE/neglect

Nationally, individual reports of child maltreatment decreased by 18% between 1995 and 2011 (Children's Bureau, 2012). Since 2010, however, the national estimates of victims have fluctuated, actually increasing by about 1% from 2010 to 2014 (Children's Bureau, 2014). A similar trend is present in New York State where the number of victims of child maltreatment fell from 75,784 in 2003 to 72,625 in 2011, but then increased from 2013 to 2014 (Children's Bureau, 2012, 2014). Furthermore, in Tompkins County, while the number of indicated reports of child maltreatment also has overall been on the decline since 2005, from 2011 to 2015 there was a 7.8% increase in the indicated reports of child abuse and maltreatment (Data USA, n.d.). According to Finkelhor and Jones (2006), changes in demography, fertility, and abortion legalization contributed to declines in child maltreatment. Specific components of parent trainings have also been found to facilitate positive changes in the behavior of both parents and children (Kaminski et al., 2008). Therefore, while parenting programs are not the only factor that has contributed to these recent declines, they seem to have played a role in successfully reducing the prevalence of child maltreatment.

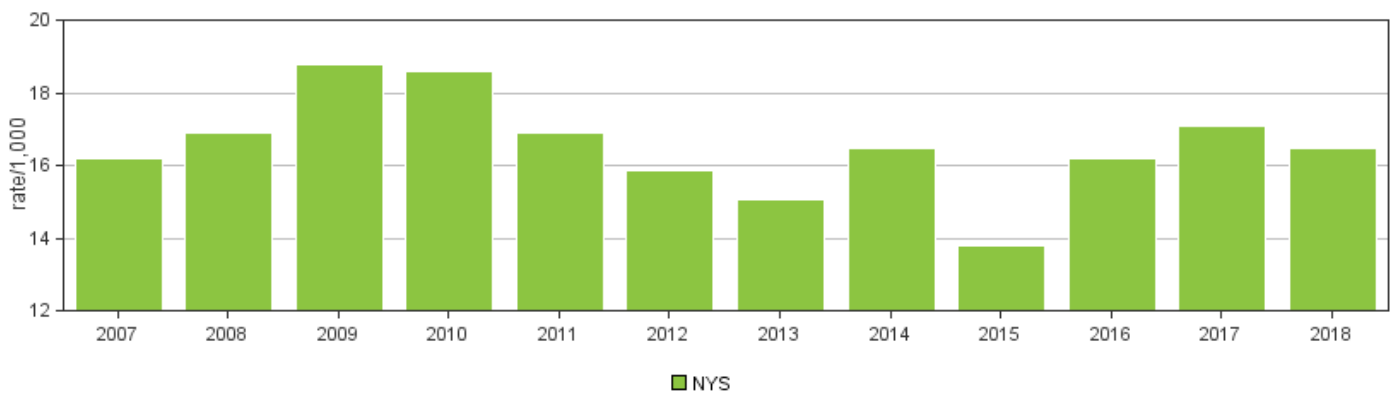
## Tompkins County, 2007-2018

Child Abuse/Maltreatment - Children/Youth in Indicated Reports of Abuse/Maltreatment  
rate/1,000 children/youth ages 0-17 years



## New York State, 2007-2018

Child Abuse/Maltreatment - Children/Youth in Indicated Reports of Abuse/Maltreatment  
rate/1,000 children/youth ages 0-17 years



# Literature Review

Parenting behaviors currently are regarded as strong predictors of child outcomes (Barth, 2009; Chaffin et al., 2001; Fennell et al., 1998). Multiple assessments of parent training programs have found that interventions aimed at preventing child maltreatment have yielded positive results in decreasing maladaptive parenting behaviors (Byrne et al., 2013; Fennell et al., 1998; Serketich et al., 1996). Research has established that parents who take part in these programs, whether voluntarily or due to a court-issued mandate, exhibit more nurturing parenting attitudes upon program completion (Byrne et al., 2013; Serketich et al., 1996). Furthermore, programs utilizing a more hands-on approach in actively coaching parents toward the use positive parenting skills are considered more effective than those solely relying on parent education as a means of facilitating the transition (Barth, 2009; Chaffin et al., 2001).

Parents who are involved in some type of parenting skill training program are more equipped to respond to their children's' needs, also leading to improvements in child outcomes (Byrne et al., 2013; Letarte et al., 2010; Serketich et al., 1996). Studies also have shown that parent training programs commonly are associated with both the prevention and improvement of early childhood behavioral problems (Barth, 2009; Fennell et al., 1998; Kaminski et al., 2008). Additionally parents have observed fewer and less frequent disruptive behaviors in their children after completing their respective programs (Letarte et al., 2010). This is likely due to the fact that parents who participate grow to have more positive perceptions of their children and become less potentially abusive towards them (Byrne et al., 2013; Kaminski et al., 2008). Such effects of parenting programs on the externalizing behaviors may also help reduce the larger social costs of child abuse and neglect (Barth, 2009; Mihalopoulos et al., 2007).

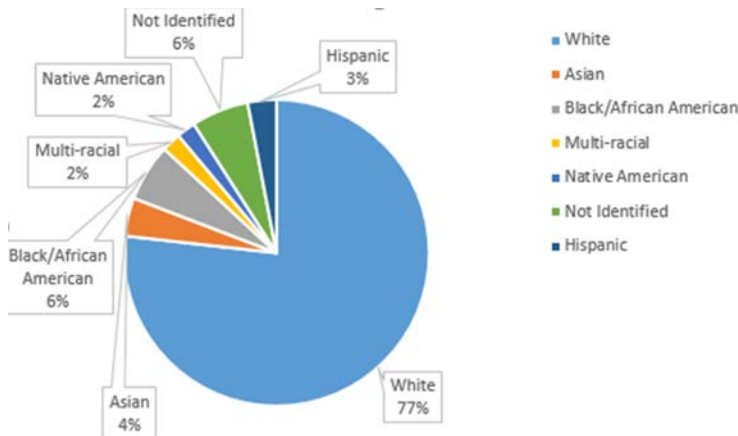
## STUDY SAMPLE

2019 UPDATE

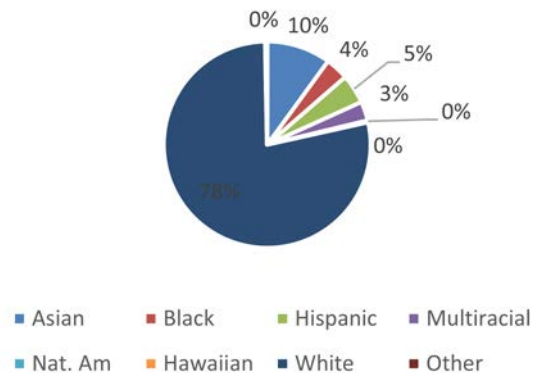
The study analyzed data collected from the *Parenting Skills Workshop Series* from 2005 through 2019. Data from four series, a total of 21 people, were collected in 2005. The number of participants in 2006, 2007, 2008, and 2009 were 38, 73, 36, and 59 respectively. The number of participants in 2010, 2011, and 2012 were 30, 50, and 45 respectively. In 2013, data was collected from 52 participants in five series and in 2014, there were 50 participants from five series. In 2015, data was collected from 32 participants in four series, and in 2016, there were 28 participants from four series. In 2017, there were 27 participants from four series. In 2018, there were 35 participants from five series. In 2019, there were 49 participants from six series.

In 2019, the sample included a total of 618 participants. Of the 618 in the sample, 76% identified themselves as "White", 4% as "Asian", 6% as "Black/African American", 2% as "Multi-racial", 3% as "Hispanic", and 2% as "Native-American". 6% did not identify race. Of the 618 participants, 326 were women, 190 men; 18 others did not specify gender. These percentages are similar to the racial/ethnic demographics for Tompkins County. Both mandated and voluntary participants attended the workshops. From 2005 to 2019, data collected on mandated status revealed that 211 of 618 participants were mandated, 308 were not mandated, and 99 chose not to respond.

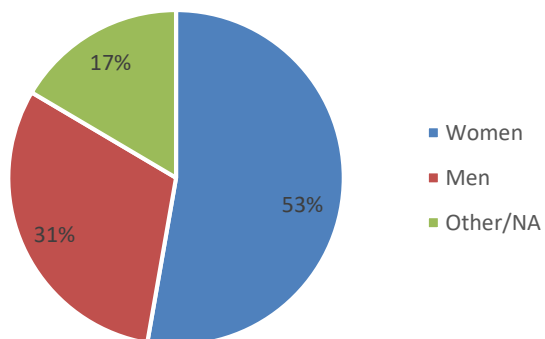
### Ethnicity of Sample 2005-2019



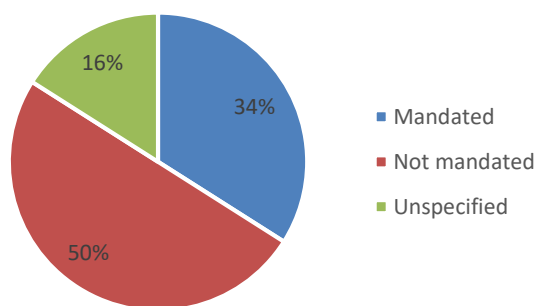
### Ethnicity for Tompkins County Overall



### Gender



### Mandated Status



1. This evaluation project was made possible with assistance from June Mead, Francoise Vermeylen, Lydia Ma, David Filiberto, Monica Hargraves, CU Prof Maureen Waller, multiple Cornell students and Masters of Social Work interns.
2. Parenting Skills Workshop Series: A Manual for Parent Educators©, Bailey, Perkins, and Wilkins; Cornell Cooperative Extension, 1995.

# EVALUATION DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

In 2005, program administrators developed a mixed-method evaluation design to evaluate the efficacy of *PSWS*, which includes:

- A quantitative component to measure knowledge, skill, and behavior changes reported by the participants after they complete the workshop series;
- A qualitative component with open-ended verbal and written feedback from participants to assess their learning and application at the end of the eight sessions.

Data collected from 58 series from 2005 through 2019 were included in this study. The curriculum, teaching format and evaluation tools were uniform. Of note is that data on mandated status was not collected until 2007. In most cases, the same two parenting educators facilitated the 8 sessions, with 20 individuals facilitating during the time of the study.

At the end of the eight sessions, individual, written retrospective post/pre surveys were completed. A group interview also was conducted. The *PSWS* co-facilitators were not present during these interviews or during the survey completion. Each individual survey was coded and then data entered into a database. Quantitative data from the parenting skills and attitudes survey was analyzed in Excel by gender, ethnicity, and mandated status as variables for statistically significant differences.

To assess the level of change researchers calculated the mean differences between *before* and *after* ratings for all participants, for each question. Paired samples t-tests were calculated to determine the significance of observed differences.

## SURVEY QUESTIONS

Participants rated their ability to:

1. *Try out different approaches*
2. *Deal with challenging situations*
3. *Use **encouragement***
4. *Use **can do***
5. *Use **choices***
6. *Use **self-control**, identify “body messages”*
7. *Use **self-control**, use “choosing a way”*
8. *Use **respecting feelings***
9. *How confident are you about parenting?*
10. *How big an issue are conflicts in your family?*
11. *How satisfied are you with your family?*
12. *How positive do you feel about yourself as a parent?*

The *PSWS* manual and evaluation report can be found at:  
[http://www.parenting.cit.cornell.edu/pp\\_psws.html](http://www.parenting.cit.cornell.edu/pp_psws.html)

## SURVEY RATING

The surveys consisted of 12 items relating to skill acquisition measuring a *before* and an *after* score for comparison. Participants were asked to rate their ability along a four-point scale.

Illustrations were used on the survey to help address literacy issues. For example:

Questions 1-8 were rated from *not good, neutral, pretty good, to great*.

Question 9 was rated from *not very, some, confident, to very*.

Question 10 was rated from *not an issue, a little, big issue, to very big*.

Question 11 was rated from *not very, some, satisfied, to very*.



1. Not very good



2. Neutral



3. Pretty good



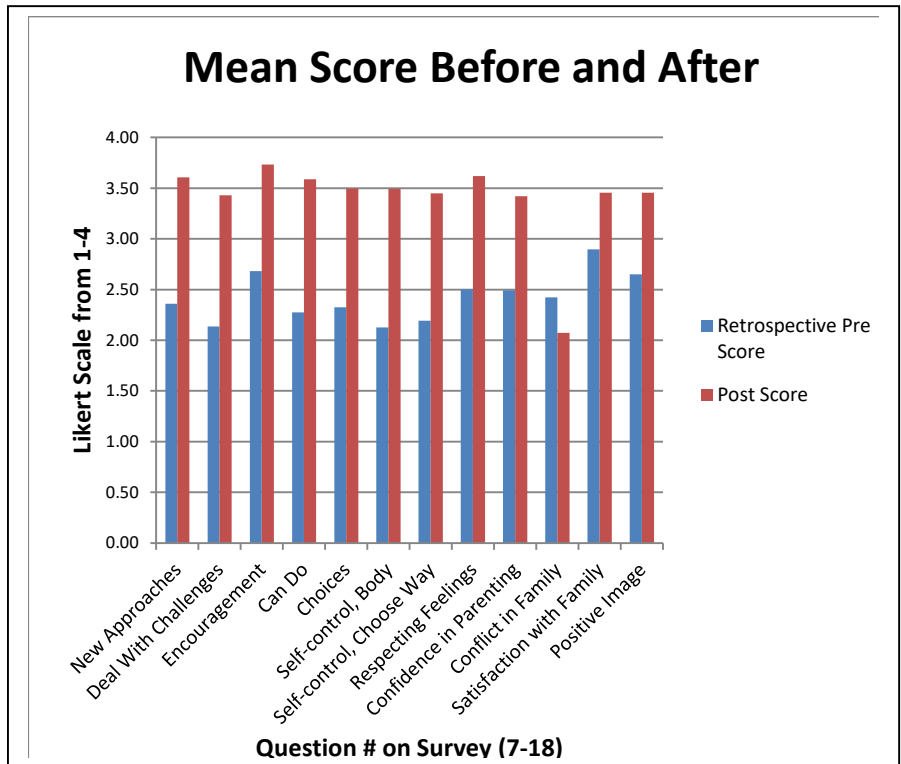
4. Great!

# RESULTS

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The chart provides a graphic representation of the before and after mean scores. For all items tested, participants reported feeling “pretty good” or “great” about their ability to use the skills after completing the workshop. The smallest difference was found for “how big an issue” conflict was in the participants’ families.

Table 1 displays the results of the mean scores that were calculated to measure the significance of the change between the before and after responses on the Likert scale questions. The first column shows the mean comparison scores and p-value for each survey question for the entire sample (n=618). The remaining columns show mean differences for important sub-groups of participants.

Parents reported the largest difference from their before ratings for the specific skills taught in the program, with the largest positive change in the use of the Self Control –



**Table 1** Mean Comparison Scores: Changes in Parenting Attitudes & Skills

Question	Entire Sample		White		Non-White		Non-White		Wome		Mandat		Non-mandated	
	Mean	P-Value	Mean	P-Value	Mean	P-Value	Mean	P-Value	Mean	P-Value	Mean	P-Value	Mean	P-Value
1. New Approaches	1.25	0.00	1.27	0.00	1.22	0.00	1.16	0.00	1.28	0.00	1.34	0.00	1.16	0.00
2. Deal with Challenges	1.29	0.00	1.29	0.00	1.30	0.00	1.20	0.00	1.34	0.00	1.35	0.00	1.26	0.00
3. Encouragement	1.05	0.00	1.07	0.00	1.12	0.00	1.07	0.00	1.04	0.00	1.07	0.00	1.01	0.00
4. Can Do	1.32	0.00	1.31	0.00	1.38	0.00	1.24	0.00	1.35	0.00	1.34	0.00	1.31	0.00
5. Choices	1.17	0.00	1.19	0.00	1.18	0.00	1.13	0.00	1.19	0.00	1.22	0.00	1.12	0.00
6. Self-control, Body	1.37	0.00	1.43	0.00	1.31	0.00	1.26	0.00	1.43	0.00	1.38	0.00	1.32	0.00
7. Self-control, Choose Way	1.26	0.00	1.31	0.00	1.32	0.00	1.18	0.00	1.29	0.00	1.26	0.00	1.21	0.00
8. Respecting Feelings	1.12	0.00	1.16	0.00	1.21	0.00	1.05	0.00	1.15	0.00	1.11	0.00	1.07	0.00
9. Confidence in Parenting	0.93	0.00	0.95	0.00	0.94	0.00	0.83	0.00	0.99	0.00	0.95	0.00	0.91	0.00
10. Conflict in Family	-0.35	0.00	-0.36	0.00	-0.09	0.55	-0.37	0.00	-0.36	0.00	-0.38	0.00	-0.32	0.00
11. Satisfaction with Family	0.56	0.00	0.57	0.00	0.51	0.00	0.46	0.00	0.63	0.00	0.65	0.00	0.50	0.00
12. Positive Image	0.80	0.00	0.81	0.00	0.71	0.00	0.71	0.00	0.86	0.00	0.86	0.00	0.76	0.00
N (average responses)	571		347		77		202		348		194		288.75	

Each value is significant at the 95% confidence level except Q10 in category Non-white. A p-value is significant at the 95% confidence level when it is less than 0.05. When reading the “mean” column, interpret values as the average difference between before and after the program. A positive value indicates that on average participants improved in the category. Negative values, found in Q10, indicate a decrease in a given issue. This indicates a decrease in family conflict.

# ADDRESSING THE EVALUATION DESIGN

All self-report surveys carry the risk of respondent bias. Individuals reporting on their own performance may over-estimate their gains for various reasons. Program administrators designed the evaluation process and survey attempting to mitigate these factors. All surveys are anonymous and co-facilitators are not permitted to be present during the evaluation to help encourage honesty.

Program administrators also recognize that some researchers encourage the use of a pre/post design in place of a retrospective design to address memory problems. However, a potential problem in a pre/post design is "response-shift bias," in which participants over-estimate their behaviors on the pre-survey and under-estimate their behaviors on the post-survey due to a change in frame of reference. This effect is avoided by using a retrospective survey. Despite the potential of "response-shift bias", a pre/post design is anticipated for the next level of evaluation for PSWS.

Finally, this evaluation design lacks a comparison or control group, which means it has not reached the "gold standard" for program evaluation.

## CONCLUSIONS & FUTURE PLANS

The statistically significant increases found in the mean comparison scores on skills indicate that *Parenting Skills Workshop Series (PSWS)* is effective in teaching parenting skills. The sub-samples studied also showed statistically significant increases. Women and "White" participants report the seemingly strongest increases in these comparisons and it is of interest to note that mandated and non-mandated participants score similarly. Additionally, parents reported statistically significant increases in their confidence in parenting, satisfaction with their families and how positive they feel about themselves as parents. Participants also reported a statistically significant increase in feeling included in the group, suggesting an important decrease in feelings of isolation.

The philosophical framework of the program is strength-based, intent on empowering families to make pivotal changes in cognition and behavior. Clearly, the participants respond positively to the theoretical framework of PSWS.

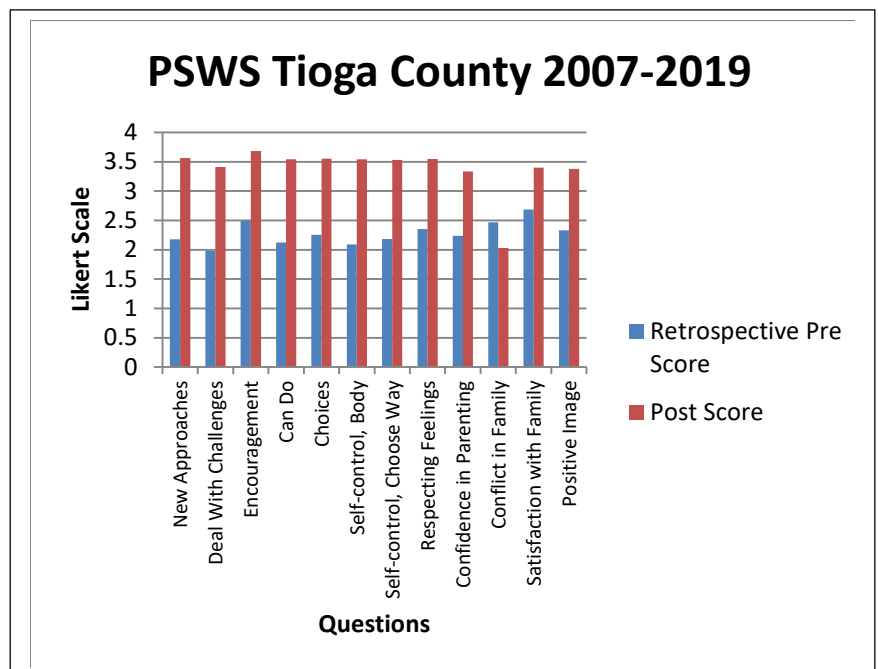
Program administrators continue to actively collaborate with faculty and peer experts in the fields of evaluation and parenting education, potentially expanding into an evaluation research project. Revisions to the survey instruments for a pre/post design are underway. Please contact us if you are interested in using the Parenting Skills Workshop Series, or are currently using Parenting Skills Workshop Series and are interested in participating in this evaluation project.

Many parties agree that the inclusion of a comparison or a control group in the evaluation design also would strengthen the results. Random assignment to treatment, however, raises concerns for mandated participants. Careful consideration and meticulous planning with stakeholders will be required before a control group could be implemented.

The significant results of these post/pre data provide the springboard for a more rigorous evaluation design.

### Appendix A Cornell Cooperative Extension—Tioga County 2007-2019 Evaluation Report Chong Wei & Rebecca Ribeiro, MSW, 2010; 2019 Update: CU Prof. Maureen Waller, CU Grad. Student Nathan Robbins

In an analysis of data from 2007-2019 PSWS workshops offered in Tioga County reveals that the participants (n=125) report statistically significant changes in their knowledge of and ability to use the parenting methods presented in the series. Participants reported greater satisfaction with their families, greater confidence as parents and an increase in their ability to try new solutions in various situations. Participants also reported a decrease in conflict in the family after completion of the PSWS.



**Abstract**

A focus group study was conducted on December 5, 2007 with *PSWS* participants who had completed the workshop series the previous week. Eleven parents participated in the focus group. A cassette recorder was used to capture the 30-minute interview. A transcript of the interview was color-coded and themes and conclusions were identified. A phenomenological, line-by-line grounded-theory framework was used to analyze the data. Axial coding revealed several salient themes, presented in three tiers: *individual change*, *familial change*, and *community change*. Quotes from focus group study participants support the conclusions.

Spring 2008

**CHANGES ON THE INDIVIDUAL LEVEL**

**PSWS results in parents improving their self-esteem.**

Parents are able to forgive themselves for making mistakes while self-determining to make better choices in the future. Parents teach each other skills that they have learned and also teach their children improved communication skills, reinforcing a positive self-image.

“[I learned] to stop putting yourself down so much and start listening to some of the stuff that you might be doing.”

**PSWS promotes increased self-awareness as it encourages participants to exercise self-determination in implementing new skills.** Parents observe themselves in action and can achieve pivotal insights about their behavior. The strengths-based foundation of *PSWS* promotes self-determination in implementing new skills and strategies for improved communication.

“I’m not letting [my child] get away with everything; I’m teaching them to accept taking ‘no’ for an answer...”

**PSWS reduces isolation, stress and provides a support network for parents.** Parents learn some parenting challenges are universal and find support as they face their unique challenges. *PSWS* also provides a supportive environment for parents as they change long-term patterns and implement changes in their parenting style.

“I liked ...being able to ...sit down and work on our goals in our lives and our children’s; and having everyone’s input was important, without judgment.”

**CHANGES ON THE FAMILY LEVEL**

**PSWS results in healthier families.** Parents find stress reduction, exercising more self-control when parenting and tuning into their child’s needs helped them implement newly learned, child-friendly skills. *PSWS* promotes long-term, positive changes for families where participants model new behavior and teach new communication skills to their children.

“...this group made me learn how to be patient...I’m not yelling anymore...”

**Implementation of PSWS skills facilitates changes in parenting style which directly and positively impact both parent and child behavior.** Parents are able to observe significant, positive changes after implementing *PSWS* skills. Parents become aware of how their choices affect their children’s behavior.

“It’s given me more of my child’s perspective on the things that I do and how it actually affects them.”

**CHANGES ON THE COMMUNITY LEVEL**

**PSWS is an asset to its community.** Participants use improved communication skills in every level of social interaction, modeling effective behavior and emphasizing positivity with others throughout their community.

“[PSWS works] not just with the kids, [but] with everybody around you...”

**Building Parenting Skills: A Program Evaluation**  
**Camille Tischler, PhD**

Cornell Community and Rural Development Institute, Vol 8, No 1, Fall 2000

**Executive Summary**

The *Parenting Skills Workshop Series* works “to replace impulsive behavior with rational behavior and ineffective or hurtful parenting styles with effective, child-friendly skills”. Do program activities fit program theories, and are participants’ perceptions and actions consistent with program goals? This evaluation showed that program activities are consistent with program theory, that participant thoughts and feelings about the program are positive, and that their experiences meet program designers’ goals. While a thorough study of skill comprehension and application was not feasible, home visit facilitator data and the participant review of skills in the workshops provides evidence that, with some significant exceptions, participants do understand and use the skills.

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