

Towards Flourishing Everyday Strategies

Towards Flourishing is built on the evidence that it is possible to improve our mental health by embedding simple, evidence based practices, into everyday life. Many simple strategies have been scientifically proven to improve mental health because they have reliable effects on at least one specific behavior (Embry & Biglan, 2008). These simple strategies are like the “active ingredients” found in more complex interventions. They are the building blocks for creating greater change.

The Towards Flourishing team consulted with experts, and searched the research literature to compile a long list of these kinds of simple strategies. A group of key stakeholders, who work with the Families First Home Visiting Program then met with the Towards Flourishing team to look at the strategies and determine which ones would work well within the home visiting program. Nine strategies were selected because they had demonstrated effects on adult or parental mental health, they were simple, easily taught by word of mouth, no-cost, and fit well with the way that the Families First Home Visiting program was already delivered.

For each strategy, a handout was created so that parents could work through the strategy, and have a reminder sheet to keep and refer to later. Each strategy is also accompanied by an instruction sheet for home visitors that includes information on what the strategy is, step by step instructions for doing the strategy, suggestions for using the strategy with others (for example, with your children, or your partner), and an explanation of the benefits of the strategies.

The nine strategies are referenced at different points in the Towards Flourishing curriculum, where it is suggested that home visitors consider introducing one or more of the strategies to a parent. The strategies can also each be used emergently – during the course of any home visit – when the opportunity arises

to teach a new strategy, or to revisit a strategy that has been previously taught.

These nine strategies can be practiced by anyone; however, the resources developed for Towards Flourishing focused on teaching the strategies to parents within a home visiting program like Families First. Recently the strategies have been adapted for parent support groups lead by trained facilitators or public health nurses (e.g. Healthy Baby groups).

The nine Everyday Strategies included in the Towards Flourishing curriculum are:

Creating a Vision:

Parents create a vision for themselves or their families by using a handout, and with guidance from their home visitor. Creating a vision helps parents identify what is important to them, and can also help to identify goals that they can work towards.

Three Good Things:

Parents identify three good things that they experienced that day and write them down on a handout. Writing down three good things about the day helps to increase positive thinking, happiness and sense of well-being.

Belonging:

Home visitors help parents to identify a group, or groups that they feel they belong to, and to think about what it means to belong to those groups. Parents write or draw on a handout that they can keep and refer to later. Having a sense of belonging is an important part of being mentally and socially healthy. The groups we belong to are an important part of our identity, and it is important to belong to groups that share our positive values.

Connecting With Others:

This strategy encourages parents to think about the people they connect with, how they benefit from connecting with other people, and what kinds of small things they can do to improve, or increase the connections they have with others. Connecting with others on a regular basis can reduce isolation, and increase coping resources.

Nasal Breathing:

Parents learn this very simple strategy for taking several breaths through the nose instead of breathing through the mouth. Nasal breathing can help a parent to stay calm, which can allow them to think more clearly in times of stress.

Physical Activity:

Parents receive instructions and handouts to guide them through different kinds of physical activity including walking outside, dancing, and taking an activity break. Being physically active can decrease stress, increase energy, and reduce the likelihood of many physical illnesses.

Self Monitoring:

After choosing a simple goal, parents keep track of their progress towards that goal. A handout is provided to keep track of their progress and the home visitor checks in with the parent at a following visit to see how it is going. Keeping track of progress on a handout like this makes it more likely that a parent will reach their goal.

Three Minute Breathing:

Home visitors give parents instructions for this three minute exercise that helps them to check-in with themselves, focus their attention, and notice what they are experiencing in that moment. Noticing their experience in the present moment can help parents to be in touch with themselves, make better decisions, and enjoy the good things in their lives.

Progressive Muscle Relaxation:

Home visitors teach parents to tense and relax different muscle groups. This helps the body learn to relax more and more, and can help the mind to relax as well. Learning to be more relaxed can help reduce headaches and backaches caused by stress and muscle tension. Being more relaxed also makes it easier to cope with stress.

Reference:

Embry, D. D., & Biglan, A. (2008). Evidence-based Kernels: Fundamental units of behavioural influence. *Clinical Child and Family Psychology Review*, published with open access at Springerlink.com