



“Living Adolescence in Family” parenting program: Adaptation and implementation in social and school contexts



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ABSTRACT

Adolescence is a developmental period that implies a series of rapid changes that might complicate the role of parents. This study evaluates changes in parental monitoring and the strategies to solve family conflicts reported by parents who participated in the “Living Adolescence in Family” program in local social services and school centers. In addition, the study analyses the moderating role of family and facilitator variables that may affect the final results. The participants were 697 parents attending the social services (438 in the intervention group and 259 in the control group) and 1283 parents from school centers (880 in the intervention group and 403 in the control group). The results showed that families from local social services decreased the amount of control and improved monitoring in education and leisure spheres as well as self-disclosure whereas the families coming from school centers improved supervision in leisure and in self-disclosure. In addition, both groups of families improved their strategies for solving family conflicts, increasing the use of integrative strategies and decreasing the use of dominant strategies. There were differences across contexts: the results of the program in the social services context differed according to the participant and professional profiles whereas program results were more homogeneous in the school context. In sum, the program appears to be an efficient work tool, both for the professionals who work with at-risk families with adolescents and for the teachers who make use of the program for families with children at risk of early school dropout.

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Programa “Vivir la adolescencia en familia”: adaptación e implementación en servicios sociales y entorno escolar

RESUMEN

La adolescencia es un período de desarrollo que implica una serie de cambios rápidos que podrían complicar el papel de los padres. Este estudio evalúa los cambios en la supervisión parental y en las estrategias de resolución de conflictos familiares reportados por los padres que participan en el programa “Vivir la adolescencia en familia” en los servicios sociales locales y en los centros escolares. Además, el estudio analiza el papel moderador de la familia y las variables de los facilitadores que pueden afectar a los resultados finales. Los participantes fueron 697 padres que asistieron a los servicios sociales (438 en el grupo de intervención y 259 en el grupo control) y 1283 padres de los centros escolares (880 en el grupo de intervención y 403 en el grupo de control). Los resultados mostraron que las familias de los servicios sociales locales disminuyeron el control y mejoraron en supervisión educativa y en las esferas de ocio, así como en la apertura, mientras que las familias procedentes de centros escolares mejoraron la supervisión en el ocio y en la apertura. Además, ambos grupos de familias mejoraron las estrategias de resolución de conflictos familiares, aumentando el uso de estrategias integradoras y disminuyendo el uso de estrategias dominantes. Como signo de distinción, los resultados del programa en el contexto de los servicios sociales diferían según los participantes y los perfiles profesionales, mientras que los

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resultados del programa fueron más homogéneos en el contexto escolar. En resumen, el programa parece ser una herramienta de trabajo eficiente, tanto para los profesionales que trabajan con las familias con hijos adolescentes en situación de riesgo como para los profesores que han realizado el programa para familias con niños en riesgo de abandono escolar temprano.

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Adolescence is associated with a developmental period of rapid changes, where boys and girls present a greater level of vulnerability for risks, such as the increase for anti-social behavior and juvenile crime, drug consumption or school dropout, among others (Arenas, Hidalgo, & Menendez, 2009). The level of such risks is even greater for those boys and girls from families in at-risk psychosocial contexts (Rodrigo, Maiquez, Martin, & Byrne, 2008). It is well known that poor, violent neighborhoods, life stress, couple violence, low educational backgrounds and school truancy, single parenthood, parental mental-health problems and substance abuse, among others, are family conditions frequently related to inadequate parenting and poor developmental outcomes of the children (e.g., Belsky, 1980; Rogosch, Cicchetti, Shields, & Toth, 1995). As a result, it is important that adolescents may have access to protection factors to compensate for this vulnerability. One of these protection factors that promotes the child wellbeing is the family participation in school support (Rodrigo, Byrne, & Rodríguez, 2013).

During adolescence it is necessary that families may be able to provide love, positive models for socializing, encouragement, and support, controlling children's behavior in order to foster autonomy and sense of responsibility (Oliva, 2006). Specially, the family should take into account the external contexts where adolescents are involved, since the peer group and couple relationships become more and more important for their healthy development in this stage of life. For this reason, parental control becomes essential, since thanks to that, although adolescents experience with risky situations, the exposure to excessive risk is avoided (Barber, Stoltz, & Olsen, 2005; Parra & Oliva, 2006). One of the dimensions of parental control is behavioral control, which may be manifested as a way of police control and/or overprotection, or on the contrary, as a more respectful kind of behavior, adapted to the need for autonomy that adolescents tend to demand (Collins & Steinberg, 2006; Parra & Oliva, 2006). It is relevant for parents to manifest this supervision in their children's academic sphere, which is a positive influence for reaching higher academic grades (Collins & Steinberg, 2006; Parra & Oliva, 2006) as well as in the leisure sphere, finding out what happens during evening outs for socializing (Fletcher, Darling, & Steinberg, 1995). Moreover, in order to get a right degree of supervision, it is crucial to keep the channels of communication between parents and children open, encouraging a trustworthy relationship between them, since if doing so, adolescents may spontaneously disclose their own interests and whereabouts (Kerr & Stattin, 2000).

During this developmental stage, family conflicts play also an important role, since they mostly tend to emerge from the parents' inability to understand adolescents' new necessities for autonomy, which leads them to prefer to spend more time with their peers (Rodrigo, García, Máiquez, & Triana, 2005). In spite of the fact that a high amount of family conflict may generate adverse effects, it really depends on the way conflicts are solved (Rodrigo, García, Máiquez, Rodríguez, & Padrón, 2008). The majority of the studies have focused on three styles of problem-solving: integration or negotiation, which implies trying to understand the other and using constructive reasoning strategies which lead to commitments; domination, which implies keeping the posture without taking the other into account and expressing negative feelings and

the avoidance that the denial of conflict implies (Caughlin & Ramey, 2005; Gilani, 1999; Laursen, Coy, & Collins, 1998; Smetana, 2005). If the resolution is suitable, then the conflicts assume an adaptive function, since they allow parents and children to rearrange their relationships and responsibilities, getting a new relationship based on confidence, communication and tolerance (Laursen & Collins, 2004; Steinberg, 1990). The positive conflict resolution leads to a decrease in discrepancy between parents' and children's points of view (Holmbeck & Hill, 1991); it also allows a certain distance at a psychological level, which benefits the individualization process and the creation of the identity (Musitu, Buelga, Lila, & Cava, 2001; Smetana, 2005), and provides a model for positive conflict resolution to be implemented in other conflicts (Smetana, 2005).

In general terms, parents need support for their childrearing task. One of these ways of support is that families take part in parent education programs, where abilities as for parents as for personal life are promoted (Rodrigo, Maiquez, & Martin, 2010). However, there is a lack of those programs that are based on evidence (Rodrigo, Almeida, Spiel, & Koops, 2012). One of these programs is "Living Adolescence in Family" (in Spanish *Vivir la adolescencia en familia*), which provides psycho-educational support for parents with adolescents who want to improve family coexistence through the acquisition of parent competences from the positive parenting perspective (Rodrigo, 2010; Rodrigo et al., 2011). The program is conceived as community-based intervention targeted to at-risk families, delivered by the local services to provide the most focused and longest possible service, which should be offered as close as possible to the home environment (Rodrigo et al., 2008a,b). The aim of the program is supporting and fostering practice in the childrearing task, as well as the positive coexistence in the family, so as to encourage parents' and adolescents' personal development. The program structure consists of five modules: *Approaching adolescence*; *Beyond family conflict*; *Toward a healthy lifestyle in family*; *Adolescents' new ways of communication*, and *The family-school relationship*. Each one of the modules is formed by four sessions (each one lasts over an hour and a half for each week), besides a warm-up session to settle the group norms and includes an initial assessment, as well as a final lesson that includes a final assessment. The present program follows the experiential methodology, according to which parents' are exposed to daily experience allowing them to become gradually aware of their own practices in childrearing, so as to analyze their consequences and decide personal aims for change (Rodrigo et al., 2010a,b).

For its implementation in the Social Service context, the program was encharged by the *Junta de Comunidades de Castilla-La Mancha*, asking for the collaboration of the group program from the ULL and the ULPGC, which were in charge of its elaboration, implementation and evaluation (Rodrigo et al., 2010a,b). Subsequently, other social services from different zones in Spain who showed interest in the implementation of this program were contacted. Therefore, the program was carried out by Social Service professionals in Castilla la Mancha, Lleida and The Canary Islands simultaneously, since 2010 until 2014. In addition, the program has been adapted to be implemented in The Canary Islands in the context of school education, reinforcing those contents that are related to scholarship continuity, after carrying out a study which showed that school dropout is highly influenced by the family and school

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