



# HEALTHY STEPS FOR YOUNG CHILDREN PROGRAM

## PROTOCOL: PARENT GROUPS

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### I. DEFINITION

Healthy Steps<sup>SM</sup> practices offer parent groups so that mothers and fathers with children of similar ages or with similar interests can exchange information and address issues of mutual concern with the guidance of an experienced group leader/facilitator. The groups can reinforce the information that mothers and fathers receive in individual office or home visits and can reduce the isolation that many mothers and fathers feel in raising a young child. Parent groups may meet for a single session, or for a short- or long-term series, and they may or may not include children. Groups usually involve 15-20 people, although single-session parent seminars may be larger.

#### Objectives:

- More efficiently provide general information to families and enhance parent learning through group discussions and question/answer sessions.
- Create opportunities for families in the Healthy Steps practice to develop an informal peer support system.
- Expose mothers and fathers to different styles of parenting and interpretations or applications of child development information as they establish their own approach to child rearing.

### II. SPECIFICATIONS

**A. Hours of Operation:** Parent groups or seminars will be scheduled based on the needs and availability of mothers and fathers (e.g. evenings, Saturday hours, etc.). Healthy Steps Specialists may want to survey mothers and fathers informally during office or home visits about topics that interest them and the times when they are available. Groups may be offered to families in different forms: a series of sessions, whether short or long, gives mothers and fathers a chance to get to know one another and build relationships, while single sessions can accommodate larger numbers of participants and may appeal to families who cannot or prefer not to commit to a series. Once 20 families have enrolled in Healthy Steps, families should be offered a minimum of one seminar per month. Mothers and fathers will be made aware of groups through the Welcome to the Practice book, discussions with Healthy Steps Specialists, and the parent-to-parent bulletin board.

**B. Content:** Groups can be conducted in the Healthy Steps practice setting (e.g., waiting room or conference room) or in a convenient community facility (hospital meeting room, school, etc.). To take advantage of existing community resources and/or respond to parent interest, groups can be designed and implemented in collaboration with a community-based organization (e.g., child care center, family center, school, etc.). Although the Healthy Steps Specialist is neither required to review and approve the content of the session nor to attend parent groups, both familiarity with the session and attendance are desirable. The Healthy Steps Specialist is responsible for assuring the quality of any group offered through the practice.

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The Healthy Steps protocols were originally developed as program requirements for use in the national evaluation phase of the program. In order to ensure the integrity of the evaluation, all sites needed to implement Healthy Steps in virtually the same manner. Because evaluation concerns will not affect new practices beginning Healthy Steps operations, these practices will have considerable flexibility in shaping their Healthy Steps programs. New practices should therefore use these protocols as guidance in their decision making.

**C. Reference:** Chapter 8 of *Strategies for Change: Child Development in Primary Care for Young Children* focuses on planning and leading parent groups.

**D. Documentation for Implementation:** Notices prepared to advertise the session or group; sign-in sheets used for attendance at the session. Completed evaluation forms designed to gauge parent satisfaction with the content and format of parent groups distributed at each session (for single-session seminars) or at the end of each series of sessions.

### III. EXPECTED OUTCOMES (EXAMPLES)

- A minimum of one group session or seminar will be held each month.
- Mothers and fathers will suggest topics and participate in the groups.
- Mothers and fathers will meet peers and informal parent support networks will emerge.
- Practices will find this is an efficient way to provide information.
- Practices will find that this increases parent satisfaction with the services they offer.

### IV. MEASURES FOR THE PARENT GROUPS (PARTIAL LIST)

- Number of sessions offered, documented by announcement flyers.
- Range of topics covered.
- Data collected from parent evaluation forms.
- Attendance at sessions, documented by attendance lists.
- Provider satisfaction.