

12 Critical Elements of Successful Home Visiting Programs

These 12 elements are based on research collected by Deborah Daro of Chapin Hall at the University of Chicago and distributed by Healthy Families America. This body of research demonstrates characteristics of home visitation programs that are effective in prevention of child abuse and fostering the healthy development of children.

Critical Element #1

Initiate services prenatally or at birth.

Critical Element #2

Use a standardized (i.e., consistent for all families) assessment tool to systematically identify families who are most in need of services. This tool should assess the presence of various factors associated with increased risk for child maltreatment or other poor childhood outcomes (e.g., social isolation, substance abuse and parental history of abuse in childhood).

Critical Element #3

Offer services voluntarily and use positive, persistent outreach efforts to build family trust.

Critical Element #4

Offer services intensively (i.e., at least once a week) with well-defined criteria for increasing or decreasing intensity of service and over the long term (i.e., three to five years).

Critical Element #5

Services should be culturally competent such that the staff understands, acknowledges, and respects cultural differences among participants; and materials used should reflect the cultural, linguistic, geographic, racial, and ethnic diversity of the population served.

Critical Element #6

Services should focus on supporting the parent or parents as well as supporting parent-child interaction and child development.

Critical Element #7

At a minimum, all families should be linked to a medical provider to assure optimal health and development (e.g., timely immunizations and well-child care). Depending on the family's needs, they may also be linked to additional services such as financial, food, and housing assistance programs; school readiness programs; child care; job training programs; family support centers; substance abuse treatment programs; and domestic violence shelters.

Critical Element #8

Services should be provided by staff with limited caseloads to assure that home visitors have an adequate amount of time to spend with each family to meet their unique and varying needs and to plan for future activities (i.e., for most communities this means no more than 15 families per home visitor on the most intense service level. For some communities the number may need to be significantly lower, e.g., less than 10 families per home visitor).

Critical Element #9

Service providers should be selected because of their personal characteristics (e.g., nonjudgmental, compassionate, and able to establish a trusting relationship); their willingness

to work in, or their experience working with, culturally diverse communities; and their skills to do the job.

Critical Element #10

Service providers should have a framework, based on education or experience, for handling the variety of experiences they may encounter when working with at-risk families. All service providers should receive basic training in areas such as cultural competency; substance abuse; reporting child abuse; domestic violence; drug-exposed infants; and services in their community.

Critical Element #11

Service providers should receive intensive training specific to their role to understand the essential components of family assessment and home visitation (e.g., identifying at-risk families; completing a standardized risk assessment; offering services and making referrals; promoting use of preventive health care; securing medical homes; emphasizing the importance of immunization; utilizing creative outreach efforts; establishing and maintaining trust with families; building on family strengths; developing an individual family support plan; observing parent-child interactions; determining safety of the home; teaching parent child interaction; and managing crisis situations).

Critical Element #12

Service providers should receive ongoing, effective supervision so that they are able to develop realistic and effective plans to empower families to meet their objectives; to understand why a family may not be making progress and how to work with the family more effectively; and to express their concerns and frustrations.

An expanded version is available at the University of WI Extension Home Visitation web site. www.uwex.edu/ces/flp/homevisit.