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Author(s)

Toussaint, N.; Streppel, M.T.; Mul, S.; Gündüz, M.; van Verseveld, M.D.A.; Janssen, M.; Weijs, P.J.M.; Fukkink, R.G.

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Promoting an Early Childhood Education and Care teacher-parent partnership regarding healthy behaviours in young children – a process evaluation

N. Toussaint¹, M.T. Streppel¹, S. Mul¹, M. Gündüz¹, M.D.A van Verseveld²,
M. Janssen¹, P.J.M. Weijs^{1,3}, R.G. Fukkink^{4,5}

¹ Faculty of Sports and Nutrition, Center of Expertise Urban Vitality, Amsterdam University of Applied Sciences, Amsterdam, NL; ² Department of Education and Lifelong Learning, Norwegian University of Science and Technology, Trondheim, Norway; ³ Department of Nutrition & Dietetics, Amsterdam University Medical Centers, VU University, Amsterdam, NL; ⁴ Faculty of Child Development and Education, Amsterdam University of Applied Sciences, Amsterdam, NL; ⁵ Faculty of Social and Behavioral Sciences, Preventive Youth Care, University of Amsterdam, Amsterdam, NL.

BACKGROUND

Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) teachers at urban preschools are potential key figures to promote healthy behaviours in **young children** living in **deprived areas** and to engage parents in lifestyle related topics. An **ECEC teacher-parent partnership** regarding healthy behaviours may support parents and stimulate their children's development. However, it is not an easy task to establish such a collaboration and ECEC teachers need tools to communicate with parents about lifestyle-related topics. A preschool-based intervention was developed to promote an ECEC teacher-parent partnership concerning **healthy eating, physical (in)activities and sleeping behaviours** in young children. This study describes the process evaluation of the CO-HEALTHY intervention.

The CO-HEALTHY intervention consists of a toolkit with parent-child activities and an associated training for ECEC teachers. The activities were composed using the Intervention Mapping protocol. Intervention materials are accessible for families with different sociocultural and socioeconomic backgrounds.

METHODS

Semi-structured interviews with ECEC teachers (n=16) and parents (n=16), and a questionnaire for ECEC teachers (n=33) were used as input for the process evaluation of the intervention. Interviews were transcribed non-verbatim and thematically analysed in MAXQDA. Questionnaires were distributed via the survey software Qualtrics and descriptive statistics were calculated using IBM SPSS Statistics. The process evaluation addressed the following topics:

- 1) reach of the intervention.
- 2) implementation of the intervention.
- 3) appreciation of and experience with the intervention.
- 4) facilitating and limiting factors of the intervention.
- 5) recommendations to improve the intervention



RESULTS

The intervention was carried out at n=20 preschools in Amsterdam, the Netherlands. At n=16 preschools, at least 6 of the 10 parent-child activities were carried out.

ECEC teachers indicated that the toolkit was fun and accessible as it were activities that children and parents could do during the standard walk-in play time at preschool. The activities were a good opportunity to start a conversation about the lifestyle-related topics. For example, an ECEC teacher said, *“You could really start a conversation through the activities, and it was actually quite fun and educational.”*. The ECEC teachers evaluated the intervention with an average score of 7.9 (scale 1-10) in establishing a teacher-parent partnership.

Parents mentioned that it was enjoyable and informative to do the activities together with their child. The intervention materials were received positively by parents (e.g., the use of colourful A5 information cards). For example, a parent said, *“I actually think it is a very nice initiative, because it teaches children in a playful way what is healthy.”*.

Recommendations to improve the intervention were to pay more attention to the implementation of the parent-child activities in the day-to-day work of ECEC teachers and to encourage parents to give feedback on parent-child activities at home.



CONCLUSIONS

The CO-HEALTHY intervention was positively received. A majority of the ECEC teachers and parents think the toolkit **benefits the ECEC teacher-parent partnership** regarding healthy behaviours in young children.