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Filmando Interacciones Para Nutrir El Desarrollo: A Randomized Pilot of A Strength-Based Video Coaching Program with Mexican American Fathers

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ABSTRACT

Research Finding: Traditional fathering programs have missed an opportunity to reflect the unique family patterns and service needs of Hispanic and Latino fathers. In addition, family engagement strategies in early childhood programs have typically focused on mothers. The aim of this study was to adapt, implement, and evaluate a 6-week video coaching program, Filmando Interacciones para Nutrir el Desarrollo (FIND_{FM}; Filming Interactions to Nurture Development) with Mexican American fathers and their young children ($n = 33$). FIND_{FM} was delivered through home visits, promoted warm and responsive father-child interactions, and used video to emphasize each father's parenting strengths in the context of everyday caretaking moments. Utilizing a randomized waitlist control design, we found that fathers who received FIND_{FM} had higher levels of encouragement, lower levels of parenting stress, higher levels of identity dedicated to the fathering role, and reported lower levels of children's behavior problems at posttest relative to the control group. Further, there was a moderately strong relationship between increases in fathers' encouragement and reported decreases in children's behavior problems, which supports a central pathway in FIND_{FM}'s theory of change. **Practice or Policy:** FIND_{FM} offers a promising approach to leverage existing early childhood home visiting services to better meet Mexican American fathers' needs.

In spite of half a century of early childhood programs that recognize the critical roles of parents, fathers have been largely underrepresented in these efforts. This is in part because traditional notions of “good” fathering have focused on men's abilities to provide for and reside with their children. However, in contemporary society, fathers' contributions to children's development are being redefined to include sensitive, supportive, and nurturing parenting (Cabrera et al., 2018; Marsiglio & Roy, 2012). Reflecting this shift, newer models of father involvement have acknowledged that fathers too play an important role in the reciprocal interactions between children and caregivers that drive development (Pleck, 2010). Indeed, several recent studies have found that warm and responsive interactions between fathers and their children uniquely contribute to children's social-emotional, executive function, cognitive, and language skills, even after controlling for mothers' contributions (e.g., Amodia-Bidakowska et al., 2020; Mills-Koonce et al., 2015; Shannon et al., 2002; Towe-Goodman et al., 2014). These newer conceptual models and supporting empirical evidence reveal a missed opportunity for programs working with fathers. Only a subset of programs for fathers have emphasized parenting skills (see Cowan et al., 2010 for a review), and almost none have focused specifically on fathers' contingent responsiveness.

Unique Service Needs of Hispanic Fathers

Traditional fathering programs in the United States, which have emphasized the importance of forming and sustaining healthy marriages and increasing economic self-sufficiency, have also missed an opportunity to reflect the unique family patterns and service needs of Hispanic and Latino¹ fathers (Scott et al., 2015). Seventy-three percent of Hispanic fathers in the United States ages 18 to 44 live with all of their children, and 82% are married or cohabiting, regardless of economic or immigrant status (Karberg et al., 2017). In addition, Hispanic fathers have strong participation in the labor force, with 89% of fathers reporting working either part or full-time (Karberg et al., 2017). Yet, fathering programs across the United States serving Hispanic men typically focus on issues related to non-residential fatherhood and/ or unemployment. This suggests that current outreach efforts and available services are not optimally designed to support Hispanic fathers and families. A report from the National Research Center on Hispanic Children and Families concludes that, “Hispanic fathers are not being sufficiently [focused on] by existing responsible fathering programs. Because most responsible fathering programs tailor their curricula to issues facing nonresidential fathers, Hispanic fathers may be less likely to enroll in these programs or to benefit from them if they do enroll” (Scott et al., 2015, p. 5). With the growing Hispanic population in the United States, it is critical that new strategies to support Hispanic fathers are inclusive of the strengths that they bring to their families, in addition to being aware of the systemic inequities of poverty, residential segregation, and discrimination that many Hispanic families face (Murphey et al., 2014).

Home Visiting

Since 2012, the federal government has invested over \$1.5 billion in home visiting through Maternal, Infant, and Early Childhood Home Visiting (MIECHV). MIECHV funds home visiting services for over 150,000 families across the United States each year (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2019). Nearly 1 in 3 children enrolled in Early Head Start home visiting programs are Hispanic, with 70% of such children having a resident father. These data suggest that home visiting programs offer an unmatched opportunity to reach and engage Hispanic men; yet, to date, such programs have been predominantly tailored toward mothers (Raikes & Bellotti, 2006). Some common challenges programs have faced in engaging fathers in home visiting include perceptions that home visiting is not for men, staff resistance and stereotypes of fathers, maternal gatekeeping, scheduling conflicts, and inadequate curriculum and staff training to include fathers’ needs (Sandstrom & Lauderback, 2019).

Purpose

In this study, we aimed to address these gaps in research and practice by adapting, implementing, and evaluating a strength-based video-coaching program, *Filmando Interacciones para Nutrir el Desarrollo* (FIND_{FM}; Filming Interactions to Nurture Development) with a particular subgroup of Hispanic fathers – Mexican American fathers. Children with a Mexican heritage represent the largest Hispanic group in the United States (Murphey et al., 2014). In addition, Mexican American fathers have increasingly taken on nurturing and teaching roles within families but may also seek support in fulfilling these roles (Cabrera et al., 2000). FIND_{FM} is an adaptation of the original FIND video coaching program (Fisher et al., 2016), which was developed for general population use in the United States. FIND_{FM} is delivered through flexible home visits, promotes warm and responsive father-child interactions, and uses video recordings of father-child interactions to emphasize each father’s parenting strengths in the context of everyday caretaking moments. As described in further detail in the section *Adaptation for Mexican American Fathers*, FIND_{FM} also attends to cultural patterns of interactions and beliefs that may influence father-child interactions in Mexican origin families.

Theoretical Framework

Many programs aiming to support fathers in the past several decades were informed by Pleck, Lamb, and Levine's (1985) conceptualization of paternal involvement, which included three components: (a) paternal engagement – time spent in interactions through caretaking or play, (b) accessibility – availability of father to the child, and (c) responsibility – ensuring available resources for the child. Since that time, the engagement aspect of father involvement has become a central aspect of fathering research, and the field has moved beyond a metric of time to include more qualitative aspects of engagement. Most relevant to this study is the recognition of warmth and responsiveness as a critical qualitative dimension of father involvement and father-child relationship quality (Palkovitz, 2019; Pleck, 2010). This shift builds on Bronfenbrenner's (1994) early concept of “proximal processes,” which helps to explain why fathers' responsiveness can lead to more positive developmental outcomes for children. Bronfenbrenner proposed that development takes place through a course of progressively more complex, reciprocal interactions between a child and their immediate environment. He likened these interactions to a ping-pong game in which the child and caregiver respond to each other's moves with synchrony.

In more recent years, these types of contingent, responsive interactions between young children and adults have been coined “serve and return” interactions. Young children naturally reach out for interaction through facial expressions, vocalizations, and gestures, and when adults respond with support, encouragement, and/or vocalizations in turn, it can have positive impacts on children's development (National Scientific Council on the Developing Child, 2004/2009). In early childhood, certain aspects of contingent responsive interactions are linked to socioemotional and cognitive development (Landry et al., 2006). Sociocultural theory posits that sharing a child's foci of attention through noticing and responding to a child's cues allows the child to take on a more active role and improve behavioral regulation (e.g., Bakeman & Adamson, 1984; Vygotsky, 1978). Responses that are warm and emotionally supportive are thought to be important for children's social and emotional development (Grusec & Goodnow, 1994). Additionally, caregivers' contingent verbal responses have been linked to children's expressive language skills (Hardy-Brown & Plomin, 1985; Tamis-LeMonda et al., 2014).

Although these theories have been supported by decades of research on mothers' responsive parenting, until recently, little was known about the relationship between fathers' responsive parenting and children's outcomes. As a growing body of research has confirmed that fathers' responsive parenting during early childhood makes unique contributions to children's development above and beyond maternal responsiveness (Mills-Koonce et al., 2015; Pancsofar et al., 2010; Towe-Goodman et al., 2014), numerous scholars have called for fathering programs that support these skills (Cabrera et al., 2018; Marsiglio & Roy, 2012).

Fathering Programs to Support Responsive Parenting

Just Beginning Program

There is a newer generation of fathering programs responding to the call to recognize and support fathers' nurturing and responsive caregiving more explicitly (e.g., Wilson et al., 2016). However, we know of only one evaluated program that brings fathers together with their children to practice hands-on, responsive parenting behaviors. The Just Beginning “Baby Elmo” program was originally designed to support positive relationships between young incarcerated fathers and their children. Five sessions follow the pattern of a teaching portion followed by a contact visit when fathers practice the skills they learned (Richeda et al., 2015). An initial pre-post evaluation with 25 fathers showed promising gains in emotional responsiveness (Barr et al., 2011), and a subsequent pre-post study found evidence of gains in interactional quality (Barr et al., 2014). Currently, the Just Beginning program is being evaluated further with a large community sample of fathers.

Dads Matter Program

The “Dads Matter” enhancement to existing home visiting services is another promising program for supporting fathers’ responsive parenting. This program is a manualized training and support for home visitors around how to utilize particular strategies for engaging fathers and mothers in joint parenting work. An initial pilot test identified positive changes in the mother-father relationship, perceived stress by both parents, fathers’ involvement, and fathers’ verbal interactions with the child (Guterman et al., 2018). Neither the Just Beginning program nor the Dads Matter program has been implemented with an explicit focus on Hispanic fathers; however, 66% of the sample in the latter Just Beginning study was Hispanic.

The FIND Program

The original FIND program was designed as a 10-week home-based parent coaching program for use in the general population (including mothers, fathers, and for all racial and ethnic groups). FIND’s development was informed by the Marte Meo method from the Netherlands (Fisher et al., 2016). Marte Meo translates from Latin to mean “on one’s own strength,” reflecting the central premise of the method, which is to use video recorded in the natural environment to identify, activate, and develop skills to enable and enhance constructive interaction and development. A meta-analysis of video feedback programs for parents showed that video feedback has the potential to change parent behavior within a short timeframe (Fukkink, 2008). FIND is unique in capturing instances in which parents with young children are already exhibiting positive parenting behaviors and presenting them to the parent in a manner that is highly salient and straightforward.

Adaptation for Fathers (FIND_F) and Core Program Elements

In an earlier study, FIND was tailored specifically to meet fathers’ needs through a collaboration between the authors, the FIND program developers, and Children’s Home Society of Washington, a provider of comprehensive services for young children and families. We engaged in a months-long process of conducting qualitative interviews with fathers and early childhood home visitors (see Schindler et al., 2017). Analyses of interviews revealed a number of critical insights about making the program feasible and effective for fathers including the need to: (a) reduce the number of sessions from 10 to 6; (b) offer sessions at different times of the day, including evenings and weekends; and (c) ask fathers about their comfort level with male versus female home visitors and match them accordingly. At that time, we also adapted the images and text used in materials to reflect fathers’ roles in the family. We refer to this adaptation of the original program as FIND_F (FIND with Fathers).

FIND_F begins with the home visitor taking a 10-minute video of the father and child engaging in an everyday activity. Then, that video is carefully edited to emphasize the specific strengths observed in the father-child interactions. Edited videos are typically around 2 minutes in length. The brief, edited videos are then reviewed with the father the following week. In reviewing the video clips, the home visitor uses micro-analytic narration, highlighting the frame-by-frame sequence of events that fosters the child’s development. In this way, the goal of FIND_F is to shift the father’s perceptions of himself and his child, enabling the father to become increasingly responsive and encouraging. Home visitors also provide opportunities for fathers to comment and ask questions.

FIND_F takes place over the course of 6 manualized sessions each designed to be approximately 1 hour. In the first session, fathers are introduced to the program. Each subsequent session focuses on a specific element of a serve and return interaction, using the edited films to support fathers in learning about that element. The five elements are: (a) Sharing Child’s Focus- when the father notices what the child is interested in and puts his attention there too; (b) Supporting and Encouraging- when the father responds to the child’s “serve” through soothing, comforting, or praising the child; (c) Naming- when the father provides a word or explanation for what the child is seeing, doing, or feeling; (d) Back and Forth- when the father and child continue interacting in a longer back-and-forth manner; and (e) Endings and Beginnings- when a child signals the end of an activity and the father follows the child’s

lead. The elements of the FIND_F program and other iterations of FIND are relevant to interactions between fathers and children reflecting a wide range of ages in early childhood, spanning infancy to preschool. This is consistent with the literature on responsive interactions and aligns with the populations served in other early childhood home visiting programs. Figure 1 provides examples of each element for different age groups.

Each session includes a review of the prior elements, an introduction to the new element, a review of the film to show examples of that element, a check for understanding, and a new video recording. Fathers are provided with a summary sheet and are urged to look for opportunities to use that element during the coming week (see Figure 2 for an example session breakdown).

Though the focus of FIND_F is to work directly with fathers, the presence of children at sessions often creates opportunities for the home visitor to: (a) observe father-child interactions and gather helpful information that can be used to tailor the program to the family's needs, (b) “model the model” by engaging in serve and return interactions with the child, and (c) point out instances when the father engages in the FIND elements with the children in their care (e.g., “What happened just now was a great example of naming. Carla served by bringing her toy to you and you named, “train.”).

Early Feasibility Study

In the early phases of this work, we recruited 15 racially and ethnically diverse fathers from two income-eligible home visiting programs to participate in a pretest-posttest feasibility test of FIND_F. After 6 weeks of FIND_F, fathers' positive parenting practices significantly increased and all fathers reported decreases in parenting stress. Fathers who had experienced high levels of childhood adversity as measured by a self-reported ACE's questionnaire also showed gains in psychological and behavioral involvement and reported decreases in their children's behavior problems (Schindler et al., 2017). Findings suggested that this brief, strength-based program had the potential to support fathers, particularly those facing adversity.

In addition, through that initial phase of research, the unique challenges and strengths of particular populations became evident. Specifically, staff reported that Mexican American families enrolled in services at the agency disproportionately had fathers who were first generation immigrants, worked long hours, and “ran up against some prejudice, some discrimination, and a lack of supports.” In spite of these challenges, these fathers were also most likely to reside with their children and consistently reported that building “the relationship with [their] children is the most important thing of all.” These findings are in part what led us to adapt FIND_F specifically with Mexican American fathers.

Adaptation for Mexican American Fathers (FIND_{FM})

In its original format, FIND_F was already well-aligned with the strengths and needs of Mexican American fathers identified in the literature and our initial FIND_F evaluation. Further, because FIND_F uses videos of naturally occurring father-child interactions and highlights positive practices that fathers are already engaging in, it has a greater potential for being culturally responsive than programs that are entirely didactic or utilize stock videos of parents. However, further exploration of how the delivery of FIND_F could be adapted for Mexican American fathers was needed. We conjectured that FIND_F could be more effective if it more clearly emphasized positive traditional Mexican values, such as *familismo* (giving the needs of the family unit precedence over the individual), *caballerismo* (an emphasis on egalitarian beliefs, positive family relationships, and empathy) and *educación* (a family value that emphasizes cooperation and respect).

As a core part of the adaptation process, we conducted additional in-depth qualitative interviews with 6 Mexican-American fathers from the initial pretest-posttest feasibility test of FIND_F (Ola, 2018). The interview guide included questions specifically about the program as well as questions about fathers' cultural backgrounds, fathering and cultural influences, cultural values and beliefs, racial ethnic

Sharing Child's Focus	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •(A baby) might serve by shaking a toy and you might notice and share their focus by watching them play and explore the toy. •(A toddler) might serve by taking a few steps and you might share their focus by observing them. •(A young child) might serve by looking happy or sad and you might share their focus by noticing how they're feeling.
Supporting and Encouraging	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •(A baby) might serve by starting to fuss and you support them by picking them up and comforting them. •(A toddler) might serve by trying to fit a puzzle piece into a puzzle and you might support your child by helping them fit it in. •(A young child) might serve by going down a slide at the playground and you might encourage your child by saying, "Nicely done!"
Naming	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •(A baby) might serve by looking at someone and you might name that person (e.g., "That's grandma"). •(A toddler) might serve by hopping up and down and you might name, "hop." •(A young child) might serve by frowning and you could name, "I see you're frowning. Are you frustrated?"
Back and Forth	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •(A baby) might serve by making a sound, and you return their serve by making a sound back. Then you keep taking turns. •(A toddler) might serve by splashing a little in the bath and you return their serve by naming "splash." Then the child splashes and you say "splash" again, and you continue to go back and forth. •A (young child) might serve by pointing to a picture in a book and you might return their serve by naming what they are looking at. Then you continue to have a back and forth conversation about the picture in the book.
Endings and Beginnings	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •(A baby) might signal that they're all done eating by turning their head away. Then, they might serve to start something new by reaching for a toy. You might return their serve by saying, "oh you want your toy." •You and (a toddler) are playing peek-a-boo and after several turns your child signals they are done playing when they stop laughing and start squirming on your lap. You might say, "You want to get down?" and you help them get down. Then your child might serve by moving over to the coffee table and standing up. You might return their serve by saying, "Look at you standing!" •You might be sitting on the ground with (a young child) playing with a puzzle. Your child might signal they are done playing by standing up and walking away. Then, they might serve to start a new activity by reaching for a book. You might return their serve by saying, "let's read!"

Figure 1. Examples of FIND elements by age group. *Note:* A "serve" is when a young child naturally reaches out for interaction through facial expressions, vocalizations, or gestures (National Scientific Council on the Developing Child, 2004/2009).

tensions and structural/ institutional barriers, and cultural constructs. Using fathers' responses, we first adapted materials and text (e.g., images, phrases, examples) to better reflect Mexican American fathers. This is a similar approach to other program adaptations for Hispanic families (Bouchet et al., 2013).

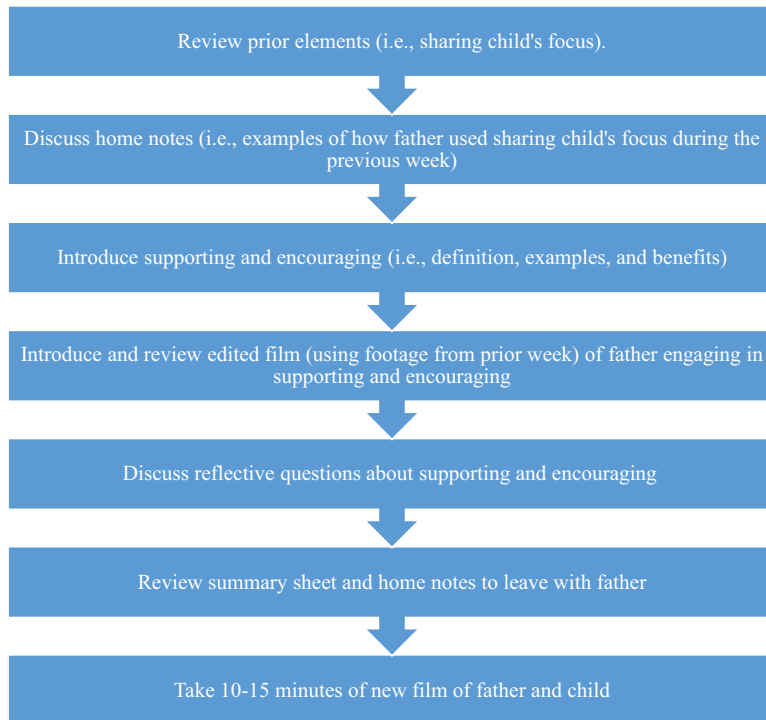


Figure 2. Sample breakdown of program session: supporting and encouraging.

We then took care to incorporate other cultural strategies to enhance program participation for fathers. For instance, the value of *familismo* permeated throughout fathers' interviews, referencing the importance of remaining "united" as a family. Given this, we made intentional efforts to incorporate the full family into the program when desired by the fathers. Though films remained focused on father-child interactions, often fathers' partners, other children, and relatives who were present in the home during the sessions would come together to watch the "highlight reels" of the positive interactions between the father and the child. As another example, fathers described their role as a financial provider as an integral part of how they defined father involvement. Given this finding and observations from our earlier research, we recognized that fathers might request to reschedule sessions due to work opportunities that arose as additional work shifts became available. Therefore, we built time into home visitors' schedules to be able to reschedule visits with fathers as needed and discussed the importance of showing warmth, understanding, and respect when fathers might need to move a session to a different day or week. We refer to this adapted version of the program as FIND_{FM} (FIND with Mexican American fathers).

Present Study

After tailoring the implementation as described above, we conducted a pilot study to test the feasibility and preliminary efficacy of FIND_{FM} with Mexican American fathers and their children. We focused on fathers who resided with a child between the ages of 6 months and 3 years old and whose families were enrolled in one of two early childhood home visiting programs. We used a randomized waitlist control design to address the following research questions related to FIND_{FM}'s theory of change² (see Figure 3):

- (1) Did FIND_{FM} improve fathers' positive parenting practices (i.e., responsiveness and encouragement)?

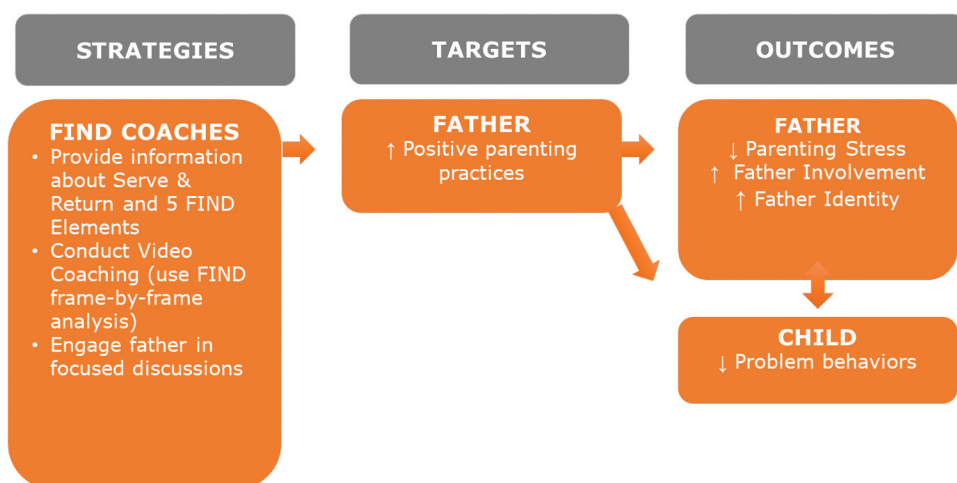


Figure 3. Theory of change.

- (2) Did FIND_{FM} improve additional father outcomes (i.e., parenting stress, father involvement, and father identity) and child outcomes (i.e., behavior problems)?
- (3) Were changes in fathers' positive parenting practices related to changes in father and child outcomes?

We hypothesized that participation in FIND_{FM} would result in increases in fathers' responsiveness, encouragement, involvement, and identity related to fathering; decreases in fathers' parenting stress; and decreases in children's behavior problems. We also hypothesized that increases in fathers' responsiveness and encouragement would be related to increases in fathers' involvement and father identity and decreases in fathers' parenting stress and children's behavior problems.

Methods

FIND_{FM} Home Visitor Training, Consultation, and Background

FIND_{FM} home visitors received systematic training and consultation to ensure that they were supported in implementing the model with fidelity across different age groups of children. Home visitors began with a two-day training led by certified FIND trainers. The training included a comprehensive overview of the program, technology training, and opportunities to role play each FIND_{FM} session. During implementation of FIND_{FM}, home visitors received individualized feedback from a certified FIND_{FM} trainer. FIND_{FM} sessions were audio recorded and reviewed by the trainer. The trainer then provided written and verbal feedback to the home visitor based on a fidelity checklist. Consultation between the home visitor and FIND trainer occurred after every session early in implementation. Consultations moved to once a month after the home visitor had met or exceeded fidelity for all critical items from the checklist in at least three coaching sessions.

All four FIND_{FM} home visitors were bilingual in English and Spanish. Two were home visitors from our partner community organization, and two were doctoral graduate students in education. Three had master's degrees in education, while one had a bachelor's degree. Two were female and two were male.

Recruitment and Participants

Upon obtaining IRB approval, we opened enrollment to up to 50 fathers who identified as Hispanic or Latino, lived with a child 6 months to 3 years of age, spoke English or Spanish, and whose families were enrolled in Early Head Start or Parent Child Home Program (Manz et al., 2016) in an urban area in Washington State. Fathers were ineligible if they had any diagnosed severe mental health challenges, determined through self-report during screening. Concerns about children's behavior problems were not part of the eligibility criteria. Instead, we advertised the program as a positive video-coaching program focused on supporting the father-child relationship.

Both Early Head Start and Parent Child Home Programs offered home visiting services through our partner community organization, Children's Home Society of Washington. Though we opened enrollment to any father who identified as Hispanic or Latino, we anticipated that the vast majority of fathers would report being born in Mexico based on the population of families the home visiting programs were serving. Fathers (or mothers on behalf of fathers) had the option to provide their contact information in order to receive more information about FIND_{FM}. From this process, we received referrals for 73 fathers who were interested in learning more about the program. After we contacted the 73 fathers, 49 fathers agreed to participate. When fathers declined to participate, we asked them a series of questions from a survey about reasons for declining to enroll. The most common reason for declining enrollment was time commitment (e.g., had multiple jobs, worked too many hours, had work conflicts), with 65% of responses indicating this as a reason. Other less common reasons for declining to enroll included that the program was out of the father's comfort zone (20%), and privacy concerns (15%).

Of the 49 fathers who agreed to participate, 11 did not end up enrolling. The majority of these cases occurred during the initial year of the project, when we had higher interest than anticipated. During that time, we did not have enough trained FIND_{FM} home visitors to serve all interested fathers immediately, so some fathers were re-contacted later. This led to some fathers declining enrollment due to a change in father's work schedule or interest in the interim between original contact and re-contact. We were also unable to reach some fathers upon re-contact.

In total, 38 fathers completed the pretest assessments and were randomly assigned to conditions (19 to the control condition, and 19 to the FIND_{FM} condition). Of those fathers who completed the pretest assessments, 33 also completed posttest assessments (17 in the control condition and 16 in the FIND_{FM} condition). These 33 fathers are the focus of our analyses. Each stage of the recruitment and randomization process can be found in the CONSORT flow diagram (see Figure 4) (Moher et al., 2001).

Fathers who enrolled in the study shared some common characteristics (see Table 1 for descriptive statistics and tests of equivalence of baseline measures). All fathers were the biological father of the child in the study and were first generation immigrants who spoke Spanish as their primary home language. All but one of the fathers reported being born in Mexico (the other father was born in Ecuador), and nearly all fathers were employed. Yet, fathers reported varying family and work experiences. Fathers' ages ranged from 23 to 60 years old ($M = 34.24$, $SD = 6.40$), and the number of years fathers had been in the United States ranged from having newly arrived to 28 years ($M = 12.67$, $SD = 6.09$). Fathers worked in several different industries, including auto repair, construction, restaurant, landscaping, painting, and retail. Sixty-four percent of the fathers were married, while the remaining 36% were living with their partner but were not married. The number of children living in the household ranged from 1 to 5 ($M = 2.28$, $SD = .92$). Only a few fathers were first-time fathers.

We used difference of mean t tests to compare baseline family demographic characteristics and outcome measures in the FIND_{FM} and control groups. The results suggest that subjects were randomized successfully. There were no significant demographic differences between the treatment and control groups at baseline. Among outcome measures, only one was approaching significance, and this was accounted for through the analytic procedures described below.

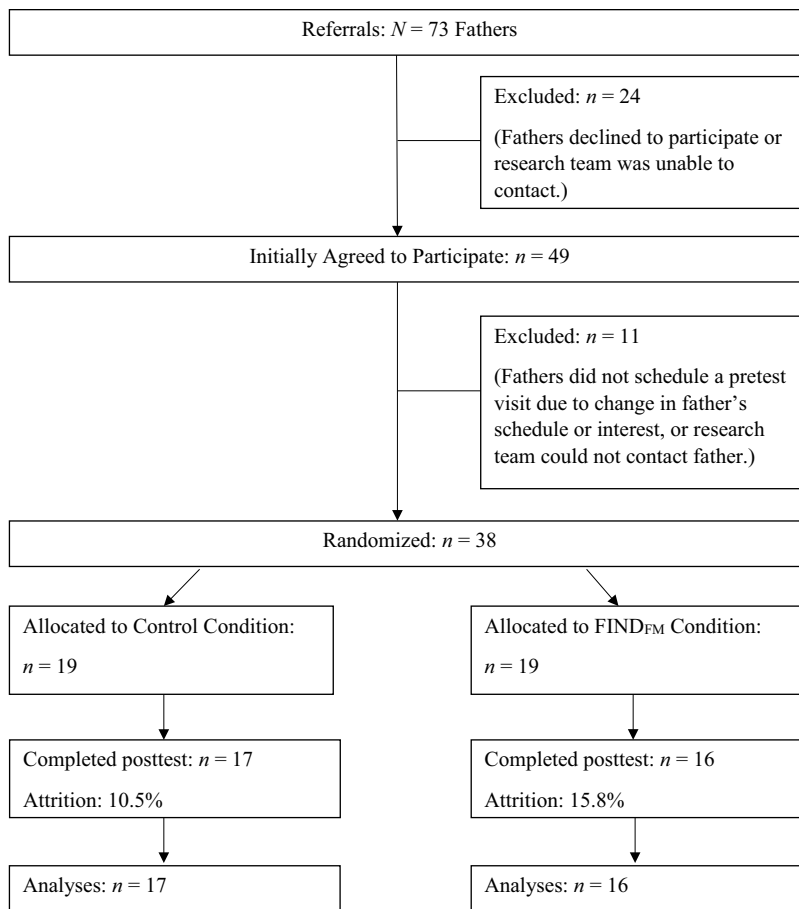


Figure 4. CONSORT flow diagram.

Procedure

As fathers enrolled in the study, they were randomly assigned to either FIND_{FM} or a waitlist control group. The waitlist control design was proposed based on views that it would be unethical to deny consenting, eligible fathers access to the FIND_{FM} program. Using a waitlist control design is common in early childhood evaluations in order to increase access to programs (e.g., Carta et al., 2013; Cassidy et al., 2017). Fathers assigned to the waitlist control group were informed that they would still receive FIND_{FM}, but at a later date (which they did). Fathers assigned to the treatment group were matched with a home visitor of their preferred gender and language. Home visitors implementing FIND_{FM} were different from the family's Early Head Start/ Parent Child Home Program home visitor. Fathers received \$40 cash compensation for participation in the pretest research visit and \$40 cash compensation for participation in the posttest research visit.

This paper comprises analyses of the pre and posttest assessments that compare the group who received FIND_{FM} to the waitlist control group who had not yet received FIND_{FM}. Pretest visits for the FIND_{FM} group took place one week before FIND_{FM} began, and posttest visits took place one week after FIND_{FM} concluded. Pretest and posttest visits for the waitlist control group took place on a parallel timeline. To address our first two research questions, we conducted one-way analyses of covariance that controlled for baseline measures of the outcomes. Because the pilot sample lacks sufficient power for detecting statistical significance, we rely on effect sizes (d) to detect meaningful differences in outcomes between the FIND_{FM} and control conditions. We interpret effect sizes using

Table 1. Descriptive statistics and tests of equivalence of baseline measures.

Baseline Measure	Control (<i>n</i> = 17)		FIND _{FM} (<i>n</i> = 16)		<i>p</i>
	<i>n</i>	%/ <i>M</i> (<i>SD</i>)	<i>n</i>	%/ <i>M</i> (<i>SD</i>)	
Family demographic characteristics					
Father's age		35.06 (8.27)		33.38 (3.59)	.46
Fathers born in Mexico	16	94%	16	100%	.33
Father's number of Years in the US		11.24 (5.63)		14.19 (6.37)	.17
Fathers employed full or part time	16	94%	15	94%	.97
Less than \$30,000 household income	9	53%	8	50%	.87
Fathers less than high school degree or equivalency	13	76%	10	63%	.40
Fathers married	10	59%	11	69%	.57
Fathers living with partner but unmarried	7	41%	5	31%	.57
Child's age (years)		1.76 (.90)		1.81 (.98)	.89
Child's gender (% female)	10	59%	9	56%	.89
Number of children in household		2.65 (1.00)		3.00 (.82)	.28
Outcomes					
Father responsiveness		8.35 (2.00)		8.19 (1.42)	.79
Father encouragement		7.06 (2.41)		7.44 (1.41)	.59
Parenting stress		69.71 (17.60)		80.13 (10.89)	.05
Father identity		123.35 (44.38)		123.44 (53.34)	.97
Father involvement		3.79 (.59)		4.01 (1.23)	.51
Children's behavior problems		13.59 (7.56)		16.31 (6.76)	.29

the criteria suggested by Cohen (1988), in which .20 represents a small effect, .50 represents a moderate effect, and .80 represents a large effect. This approach is comparable to other randomized pilot studies (e.g., Suchman et al., 2010). To address our third research question, we performed a series of standard linear regression analyses to examine whether changes in positive parenting from pretest to posttest predicted corresponding changes in father and child outcomes.

Measures

Positive Parenting Skills

Fathers' positive parenting skills were observed through videotaped father-child interactions. Fathers were provided with a standard bag of toys exclusively for the filming session and asked to "share these toys with your child as you normally would." Each set of toys (one set for pretest and one set for posttest) was carefully selected with input from home visitors about which toys could support interactions across the age range in our study. Examples of toys included soft touch baby farm animals and sensory balls. The first 10 minutes of the video-taped interactions were coded using the PICCOLO-D (Dads' Parenting Interactions with Children Checklist of Observations Linked to Outcomes). The PICCOLO-D is a strength-based measure and has previously been validated in both English and Spanish through observations of 400 low-income, ethnically diverse fathers (Anderson et al., 2013).

In the present study, a graduate student who was fluent in English and Spanish underwent approximately 40 hours of training using the user guide, training videos, and protocol from the scale developer. In addition, they underwent additional training using our own library of father-child interaction videos. Prior to coding videos from the current study, they had to reach a threshold of reliability (percentage agreement) with a master set of codes from the developer, as well as with father-specific videos that were coded from a previous pilot study. Agreement was .93 with the codes from the developer and .81 with father-specific videos. All of the pretest and posttest videos were coded during the same time period, and the coder was blinded to treatment conditions.

We examined the effects of FIND_{FM} on two subscales: 1) responsiveness and 2) encouragement. Responsiveness includes 5 items such as, "pays attention to what child is doing," "follows what child is trying to do," and "replies to child's words or sounds." Encouragement includes 5 items such as,

“supports child in making choices,” “verbally encourages child’s efforts, and “shows enthusiasm about what child is doing.” Each item was coded on a scale from 0 to 2 in which 0 = *absent*, 1 = *barely*, and 2 = *clearly*. Items were summed for total subscale scores, with higher scores representing more responsive and encouraging parenting.

Parenting Stress

Fathers’ parenting stress was measured using the Parenting Stress Index-Short Form (PSI-SF) (Loyd & Abidin, 1985). The PSI-SF asks parents to indicate their level of agreement or disagreement about 36 statements on a 5-point scale regarding their level of stress, how difficult their child is to manage, and whether parenting fits their expectations. The PSI-SF is available in both English and Spanish and has been empirically validated with a number of diverse populations, including parents of Head Start children. Items were summed for a total score, with higher scores indicating higher levels of parenting stress. The reliability for the study sample was strong ($\alpha = .90$).

Fathers’ Identity

Identity as a father was measured with The Pie, which allowed fathers to create a graphical representation of their psychological investment in the different aspects of their lives (Cowan & Cowan, 1991). More specifically, fathers were asked to list the main roles in their lives and then divide a circle (pie) into pieces so that the size of each piece represents the importance of that role. In this study, the degrees of the circle that represented fathering or parenting were measured, recorded by a research assistant, and double-checked by a second research assistant. This measure has shown high test-retest reliability for the roles of parent and partner (Cowan & Cowan, 1991) and has been used in recent studies to evaluate responsible fathering and co-parenting programs (e.g., Cowan et al., 2014, 2009).

Fathers’ Involvement

Involvement was measured with the Who Does What (WDW) questionnaire (Cowan & Cowan, 1990). In this questionnaire, fathers rated their involvement in 25 daily care tasks (e.g., playtime with child, consoling child, deciding about child’s meals/ feedings) on a scale from 1 to 9, in which 1 = *partner does it all*, 5 = *we do it about equally*, and 9 = *father does it all*. Items were averaged for an overall score, with higher scores suggesting that fathers take on proportionally more of the caretaking tasks ($\alpha = .77$). Like The Pie, this measure has been used in recent studies evaluating responsible fathering and co-parenting programs (e.g., Cowan et al., 2014, 2009).

Behavior Problems

Children’s behavior problems were measured using the infant and toddler version of the Parent Daily Report (PDR) adapted for younger children (Dozier et al., 2006) from the original Parent Daily Report (Chamberlain & Reid, 1987). Using the infant and toddler version, fathers reported whether or not their child had exhibited 38 behavior problems (e.g., cried for long periods of time, was moody or rejecting) in the past 24 hours over the course of 3 days. Items, coded dichotomously, were summed across the three days. Higher scores represent higher numbers of behavior problems.

Fidelity

Fidelity was measured with a fidelity checklist, coded via audio recorded FIND sessions by a certified FIND trainer ($n = 76$). Each session was reviewed and coded as meeting or not meeting fidelity. To meet fidelity for an entire session, the home visitor had to meet or exceed fidelity criteria in four key areas, including the review of previous elements, supporting fathers in coming up with examples, the introduction of the new element, and the film review frame-by-frame analysis.

Sixty-six percent of sessions met or exceeded fidelity in all four key areas, while thirty-four percent met or exceeded fidelity in less than four key areas. Fidelity varied across session topics. Home visitors were able to meet or exceed fidelity most easily when coaching the session about sharing the child’s

focus (i.e., when the father notices what the child is interested in and puts his attention there too). Home visitors were least likely to meet fidelity when coaching the session about endings and beginnings (i.e., when a child signals the end of an activity and the father follows the child's lead).

Results

Attendance

Of the 16 fathers in the FIND_{FM} condition, 15 (94%) completed all six sessions of the program. The remaining father completed three of the six sessions.³

Fathers' Positive Parenting

All treatment outcomes, along with raw and adjusted posttest scores and *p*-values, are presented in Table 2. We highlight findings below in which we detected small ($d = .20$) or medium ($d = .50$) effect sizes. We first examined whether FIND_{FM} improved fathers' positive parenting, conceptualized as encouragement and responsiveness. Participation in FIND_{FM} was related to a medium positive effect on fathers' encouragement ($d = .67$). Fathers who received FIND_{FM} had an adjusted posttest score of 8.59, compared to the control group, who had a score of 7.68. We found no evidence that FIND_{FM} improved fathers' responsiveness. Notably, however, fathers were already high on this measure at baseline.

Other Father and Child Outcomes

We found small differences between conditions favoring the FIND_{FM} group for parenting stress ($d = -.21$), fathers' identity ($d = .34$), and children's behavior problems ($d = -.26$). More specifically, fathers who received FIND_{FM} had lower levels of parenting stress, higher proportions of identity dedicated to the fathering role, and reported lower levels of children's behavior problems at posttest relative to the control group, while controlling for baseline levels of these measures. For parenting stress, fathers in the FIND_{FM} group had an adjusted posttest score of 74.01 compared to fathers in the control group's score of 77.17. For identity, fathers in the FIND_{FM} group attributed 121.56 degrees of the Pie to their fathering role, while the control group attributed 108.07 degrees. For children's behavior problems, fathers who received FIND_{FM} reported 11.23 behavior problems over the course of three days, while fathers in the control group reported 13.02 behavior problems. In contrast to these findings, there were no discernable effects on fathers' involvement.

Table 2. Results of ANCOVA, controlling for baseline measures of outcomes.

Outcome Measure	Control Condition		FIND _{FM} Condition		<i>d</i>	<i>p</i>
	Raw Posttest Score <i>M</i> (<i>SD</i>)	Adjusted Posttest Score	Raw Posttest Score <i>M</i> (<i>SD</i>)	Adjusted Posttest Score		
Father responsiveness	8.47 (1.50)	8.43	8.19 (1.90)	8.23	-.14	.70
Father encouragement	7.65 (1.32)	7.68	8.63 (1.50)	8.59	.67*	.07
Parenting stress	73.71 (18.40)	77.17	77.69 (10.56)	74.01	-.21	.46
					+	
Father identity	108.06 (42.39)	108.07	121.56 (44.58)	121.56	.31+	.38
Father involvement	3.78 (.96)	3.87	4.08 (1.11)	3.98	.11	.63
Children's behavior problems	12.12 (6.35)	13.02	12.19 (7.30)	11.23	-.26	.30
					+	

+Small effect size ($d = .20$)

*Moderate effect size ($d = .50$) (Cohen, 1988)

Mechanisms of Change

We subsequently examined whether the observed changes in fathers' encouragement were related to changes in fathers' parenting stress, father identity, and children's behavior problems in the FIND_{FM} group. We found a moderately strong relationship between increases in fathers' observed encouragement and reported decreases in children's behavior problems ($\beta = -.54$). On the other hand, changes in fathers' encouragement were not related to changes in fathers' parenting stress or fathers' identity. These findings are presented in [Table 3](#).

Discussion

We hypothesized that FIND_{FM} would lead to improvements in fathers' responsiveness, encouragement, involvement, and identity related to fathering; decreases in fathers' parenting stress; and decreases in children's behavior problems. We further hypothesized that increases in fathers' responsiveness and encouragement would be related to increases in fathers' involvement and father identity and decreases in fathers' parenting stress and children's behavior problems. Analyses of data supported some, but not all of these hypotheses.

In particular, we found that FIND_{FM} may be a promising mechanism for supporting fathers' encouragement of their children. Supporting and encouraging was a central session within the FIND_{FM} curriculum. During this session, fathers were provided with examples of support and encouragement, such as soothing or comforting their child, praising their child, smiling or laughing with their child, and saying/ doing something to acknowledge their child. They also viewed three frame-by-frame video examples of times when they had previously responded to their children's serves (i.e., cues) with support or encouragement. At posttest, the control group had an average score on the encouragement scale ($M = 7.68$) that was nearly identical to the average encouragement score identified from a sample of 400 ethnically diverse fathers from the Early Head Start Research and Evaluation Project ($M = 7.77$; Anderson et al., 2013). On the other hand, the group in our study who received FIND_{FM} had a meaningfully higher score at posttest ($M = 8.59$). This boost in fathers' encouragement related to participation in FIND_{FM} replicates and extends our findings from an earlier small-scale feasibility study of FIND_F with ethnically diverse fathers, in which fathers' encouragement significantly and meaningfully increased from pretest to posttest (Schindler et al., 2017). Together, these findings suggest that fathers who are enrolled nationally in Early Head Start programs might benefit from the FIND program through increases in encouragement.

We also found that increases in observed encouragement during father-child interactions were correlated with modest father-reported decreases in children's behavior problems. This provides preliminary support for a central pathway in FIND_{FM}'s theory of change, and reinforces previous findings that higher levels of fathers' encouragement during children's youngest years predict higher levels of children's social and emotional well-being (Anderson et al., 2013). Reducing children's behavior problems is typically a key concern for parents, and several parenting programs have been developed with a central goal to reduce behavior problems in young children (Farrington & Welsh, 2007). Those programs have traditionally worked with mothers and focused on behavioral management techniques and strategies for reducing harsh parenting. Findings from our study suggest that a strength-based model promoting positive parenting practices with fathers may also be an effective means of reducing children's behavior problems.

Table 3. Changes in fathers' encouragement predicting change in father and child outcomes for FIND_{FM} group.

Predictor	Parenting Stress		Father Identity		Children's Behavior Problems	
	β	p	β	p	β	p
Fathers' encouragement	-.07	.80	.17	.54	-.54	.03

FIND_{FM} was also related to decreases in parenting stress and increases in the proportion of identity fathers attributed to the parenting role. Though modest in size, observed changes in these measures are comparable to changes observed in one of the most successful group-based father involvement and co-parenting programs to date (Cowan et al., 2009; Pruett et al., 2017). We did not find anticipated improvements in father involvement. This may be because FIND_{FM} focused more on improving the *quality* of interactions versus *quantity* of interactions. We originally selected our measure of father involvement in part because it has been used in other studies of fathering programs, allowing for a point of comparison. However, because it focuses more on the quantity of father involvement, it may not be capturing changes in involvement that are specific to FIND_{FM}.

In terms of implementation, FIND_{FM} was feasible to carry out with reasonable fidelity. Our measure of fidelity placed a high standard on home visitors because they had to meet criteria in all four areas to reach fidelity for a session. Still, most sessions were carried out meeting or exceeding fidelity. Measuring fidelity also shed light on particular areas that may require additional training, support, and clarification in the future. In particular, the endings and beginnings session was the least likely to meet fidelity criteria.

Implications for Research

This study makes other important contributions beyond treatment outcomes. In an extensive review of responsible fathering programs serving some percentage of Mexican American and other Hispanic fathers, the National Research Center on Hispanic Children and Families concluded that evaluation evidence for programs with a Hispanic presence is scarce and that programs that do include Hispanic fathers have failed to tailor curricula to be culturally responsive (Scott et al., 2015). A central goal of the present study was to adapt, implement, and evaluate a program tailored to the needs of the Mexican American fathers with young children. We found that FIND_{FM} was practical to implement in the context of home visits and attractive to Mexican American fathers as evidenced by their enrollment and retention in the program. We suspect that the high retention rate for FIND_{FM} was a result of offering a program that was brief, flexible, strength-based, and culturally responsive.

Implications for Practice and Policy

Through implementing FIND_{FM}, the early childhood agency who collaborated in this work was able to engage many more Mexican American fathers than they had previously engaged through existing home visiting services. This is important to note because nationally, home visiting and other early childhood programs have long faced challenges in developing and implementing effective practices for engaging fathers (Sandstrom & Lauderback, 2019). These service systems have historical underpinnings as programs designed specifically for mothers and children to the exclusion of fathers, which can have an impact on both the internal workings of agencies and fathers' perceptions of programs such as Early Head Start (McAllister et al., 2004). Further, early childhood programs may have stereotypical views of fathers that follow societal gender stereotyping. For example, staff may assume that fathers are mainly interested in sports or services focused on employment as opposed to activities with their infants or toddlers (McAllister et al., 2004). Mexican American fathers, in particular, may experience additional forms of stereotyping and discrimination within early childhood service systems. The recruitment for and implementation of FIND_{FM} was specifically designed to address these barriers and to embrace fathers' nurturing relationships with their children in the context of home visits.

State and federal initiatives supporting home visiting (e.g., Maternal, Infant, and Early Childhood Home Visiting) should pay greater attention to the important role that fathers play in supporting children's development. To start, programs should be mindful of the language used (e.g., using "maternal" signals that programs are only for women), and should allocate funding toward tailoring

services for fathers. Given the large percentage of Hispanic families enrolled in federal and state-funded home visiting programs that include a resident father (ACF, 2014), these programs offer a particularly unique opportunity to reach and engage Hispanic fathers together with their children.

Limitations

Though there was positive support for some key pathways in FIND_{FM}'s theory of change, there were also some methodological limitations. First, the sample size was small, thus constraining our ability to test for statistical significance. A power analysis using PowerUp! Based on our findings indicates that a total sample of 387 would be needed in a larger randomized controlled trial to detect our smallest effect size meeting Cohen's threshold (.21, PSI) with a .05 probability of Type I error (Dong et al., 2015). In future evaluations, it would also be helpful to unpack for whom and under what conditions FIND_{FM} is particularly effective or less effective. For instance, future research might examine whether program effects vary by fathers' acculturation, history of adversity, or their child's age. Additionally, children's behavior problems were reported by fathers, making it impossible to discern whether children's behavior problems truly declined or if fathers' interpretations of children's behaviors changed. Future research should consider capturing observations of children's behavior problems and/or engaging additional reporters (e.g., fathers' partners).

Another limitation is the generalizability of the findings. By sampling from families who were already enrolled in existing home visiting programs, we likely engaged a particular subset of fathers who were willing and motivated to access services related to parenting. In addition, we did not measure the extent to which fathers were participating in regular home visiting services. It is possible that differences in participation between the treatment and control groups could account for some differences that we observed. This seems unlikely given the lack of other baseline differences in our randomized groups. Still, it would be interesting to capture differences and changes in fathers' participation in regular home visiting services in future studies.

Finally, this study adapted an existing program as opposed to designing a program for Mexican American fathers from the outset. Though adapting programs to be more culturally tailored for particular populations is an important step, future programs should consider collaborating with Mexican American fathers through all phases of development, including design, implementation, and evaluation. This latter approach may lead to programs that are even more culturally appropriate in design and content (Scott et al., 2015).

Conclusion

In spite of its limitations, FIND_{FM} is innovative in its engagement of fathers and children together in a home based setting and in its focus on supporting positive parenting practices. It is also one of the only programs tailored for Mexican American fathers that has been evaluated through a randomized controlled trial. The favorable findings from this study have the potential to inform other programs focused on this population of men. FIND_{FM} also offers one promising approach to leverage existing home visiting services and responsible fathering programs to better meet Mexican American fathers' needs.

Notes

1. We subsequently use the term Hispanic to refer to fathers and families who may identify as Hispanic, Latinx, and/or of Mexican origin.
2. A theory of change is a detailed set of beliefs about specific observable changes that are expected to result from a program (Schindler et al., 2017).
3. As a robustness check, we conducted our analyses excluding this case. Excluding this case did not change our pattern of results. Tables for these additional analyses are available from the first author upon request.

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