



## EVIDENCE BRIEF

# Seven Promising Practices for Developing Supports for Black Parents/Caregivers

This Evidence Brief summarizes the findings of Turner Consulting Group's report *Review of Promising Practices: Supports for Black Parents* (2020).

## HOW DID WE COMPILE THIS EVIDENCE?

Turner Consulting Group's report *Review of Promising Practices: Supports for Black Parents* (2020) is the third in a series of reports commissioned by the Ontario Ministry of Children, Community and Social Services to evaluate the Innovative Supports for Black Parents Initiative, a funding stream of the Black Youth Action Plan. This report focuses on promising practices for supporting the wellbeing of children and youth in Ontario by supporting Black parents/caregivers.

Turner Consulting Group identified promising interventions (evidence-based programs as well as innovative approaches) by drawing from the literature, clearinghouses (databases of evidence-based programs), and the research team's existing knowledge. Since the evidence review found few programs developed specifically for Black parents, the report also includes interventions for a broader audience, which can be adapted for use in Black communities.

This Evidence Brief summarizes seven promising practices for Black parent support programs; for a detailed discussion of specific interventions, please refer to the original report.

## DEFINITIONS OF KEY TERMS

**Parenting programs** are defined as “interventions, programs, or services in which parents receive direct education, training, or support aimed at influencing child outcomes” (p. 4).

**Parent** refers to “any adult in the role of primary caregiver to a child” (p. 5), and includes biological parents or grandparents, guardians, foster parents, and other carers.

## SUMMARY OF EVIDENCE: SEVEN PROMISING PRACTICES

### 01. BE CULTURALLY RELEVANT AND RESPONSIVE

The authors emphasize that paying “attention to *how* a program is implemented is as important to outcomes for Black children, youth, and parents as *what* is implemented” (p. 12, emphasis added). In addition to being mindful of language and diversity (e.g., hiring diverse staff, offering services in the family's first language, using images of Black people in program promotions), programs must also address the deeper impacts of culture on parenting practices. For instance, practitioners should be aware of the ways that people cope with pain; in Black communities, this can present as substance use or spiritual practices.

Interventions should take a strength-based approach and focus on instilling cultural pride and values, such as the importance of the extended family. Evidence suggests that whole-family approaches that promote positive racial socialization can foster positive youth outcomes, such as improved coping with stress, reduced substance use, and greater acceptance of parental influence.

## 02. USE A TRAUMA-INFORMED APPROACH AND RECOGNIZE THE IMPACT OF RACIAL TRAUMA

Trauma impacts parenting in multiple ways. Parents' experiences of trauma are associated with "less parenting satisfaction, greater levels of neglect, child welfare involvement, and using punishment" (Banyard et al., as cited on p. 18). Research also shows that children's experiences of trauma can lead to greater sensitivity to environmental threats, feelings of guilt and shame, as well as symptoms of anxiety and depression, and that these outcomes are heightened in the absence of parental support.

Many trauma-informed interventions fail to account for the experience of racialized people and the impact of racial trauma. Organizations serving Black families must understand "the compounding impact of systemic, structural, and interpersonal anti-Black racism" on Black children, youth, and parents/caregivers (p. 18). In the context of child- and youth-serving systems, an understanding of racial trauma is critical, as it can help practitioners understand young people's 'disruptive' behaviours as appropriate adaptations to a toxic environment.

Trauma-informed interventions can take many forms, including child, parent or child-parent/whole-family sessions. Programs can support youth by helping parents to identify and respond to children's needs in the aftermath of racial trauma and provide children with the tools to effectively cope with these experiences. Interventions should be culturally responsive and pay attention to the impacts of cultural beliefs and values, spirituality, as well as intergenerational and historical trauma.

## 03. STRENGTHEN PARENTING SKILLS

Evidence suggests that 'behavioural' programs can improve parenting attitudes and behaviours, and, in so doing, support positive outcomes across the child's life course. These programs focus on changing behaviours

that are perceived as 'disruptive' or 'maladaptive' by supporting children and youth to develop skills (e.g., emotional regulation, social skills, and problem-solving) and training parents to support positive behaviours at home. Research shows that these interventions are most effective when they focus on emotional communication, positive interaction, and discipline consistency, and when they provide opportunities for in-person practice.

Behavioural programs may include children and youth, their parents/caregivers, teachers, and/or the wider community. Consider innovative approaches, such as The Parent Café, which facilitates learning by fostering "safe spaces where parents and caregivers can talk about the challenges and victories of raising children, explore their strengths, and learn from each other" (p. 27).

Children may also benefit from programs that work to improve the relationship(s) between parents by fostering healthy relationship skills, addressing intimate partner violence, and helping couples adjust to parenthood.

## 04. CONSIDER THE MULTIPLE INTERSECTING IDENTITIES OF BLACK PARENTS AND THEIR CHILDREN

The lived experiences of Black children, youth, and parents/caregivers are shaped by a multitude of identities, including age, gender, sexual orientation, and disability status. Black parents and their children may experience intersecting forms of marginalization; for example, those who identify as LGBT2SQ+ may experience social stigma and discrimination based on their sexual orientation and/or gender identity, in addition to anti-Black racism.

Organizations may be able to better support Black families by tailoring their programs to the unique needs of the following groups (see the full report for examples of programs):

- fathers
- young mothers and fathers
- parents with disabilities or parents of children with disabilities
- LGBT2SQ+ parents or parents of LGBT2SQ+ children

For instance, evidence from 21 studies of fatherhood programs found that interventions are most effective when they are intensive (daily and full-time), offer incentives (e.g., driver's license reinstatement, jobs, or job training), are connected to a court, and build strong father-staff relationships.

## 05. SUPPORT PARENTS TO NAVIGATE SYSTEMS AND ADVOCATE FOR THEMSELVES AND THEIR CHILDREN

Black parents routinely experience anti-Black racism within systems, including education, child welfare, and policing. In order to effectively support – and advocate for – their children, Black parents must have access to the knowledge and resources to effectively navigate these systems.

Organizations can develop resources with information and strategies for navigating different systems. For instance, *Engaged Parenting: Navigating the School System for Black Parent Success* is a series of information sheets that provide Black parents with information about anti-Black racism in the school system. Similarly, One Vision One Voice's booklet, *Navigating the Child Welfare System: A Guide for Ontario's Black Community*, offers guidance and support for interacting with Children's Aid Societies.

## 06. CONSIDER TARGETED PROGRAMMING FOR INCARCERATED PARENTS AND THEIR FAMILIES

The overincarceration of Black Canadians has long-lasting consequences for their children, families, and communities. Research suggests that children with incarcerated parents are more likely to develop mental health and behavioural challenges, to perform more poorly in school, and to face imprisonment at some point in their lives.

Programs can support incarcerated parents to increase contact with their children, improve parenting skills and relationships with co-parent(s), and develop an effective plan for re-entry. Children and youth with incarcerated parents can benefit from transportation to visit incarcerated loved ones, as well as mentorship and peer support. Organizations can also promote the wellbeing of Black families by advocating for community-based sentencing, which has shown promise.

## 07. SUPPORT MATERNAL HEALTH

Research from the United States suggests that Black women are three to four times more likely to experience poor maternal health outcomes, including dying in childbirth, than white women. These outcomes are attributed to disparities in access to quality health care, as well as stress from racism. While no such data exists in Canada, one study found similar disparities in preterm birth between Black and white women.

Interventions can support Black women's health by addressing the social determinants of health, offering education and skill development (e.g., coping, stress reduction, life skills), and supporting Black women (and their families) to achieve greater economic security. Programs should be strength-based, holistic, and culturally affirming.