

Clinical Research Update: Family Mealtime Coaching

By Marta Shinn, PhD, Licensed Psychologist, Child Guidance Center, Inc.

The Fall/Winter 2012-2013 edition of *Working Strategies* featured the article, "Solving the Childhood Obesity Epidemic One Family Meal at a Time" introducing readers to an innovative parent coaching program. Iterations of the program have evolved into a live coaching exercise that assists caregivers in building positive mealtime communication skills and promoting healthy eating.

The original program, developed in collaboration with Dr. Riba's Health Club as Parent-Child Feeding Interaction Therapy (PC-Fit), has been further expanded by Child Guidance Center (CGC) as Family Mealtime Coaching (FMC).

FMC involves a coach who observes family mealtime behaviors from behind a one-way mirror. The caregiver, through a wireless earpiece, receives guidance from the coach about how to encourage the children to practice healthy eating habits. A pre/post randomized study funded by the Institute of Coaching at Harvard Medical School/McLean Hospital found the program effective.

Most notably, the study affirmed the protective role of family meals, which buffers against a number of risk factors including, depression, problematic eating, engagement in negative peer groups, and early substance use. Specifically, findings revealed that live coaching reduced the frequency with which parents needed to engage in coaxing and bribing their children to get them to eat healthy foods. The program showed that parents could be taught how to replace coaxing behaviors with modeling body/satiation awareness and by demonstrating how to make good food choices, while making meal time a more enjoyable and positive experience.

Child Guidance Center will continue developing *Family Mealtime Coaching* with the support of a recent grant from the Orange County United Way. In partnership with the University of California, Irvine, Institute for Clinical and Translational Sciences, and the Orange County Children and Families Commission, CGC is expanding the program to include exercise in the form of physically active play among children.



For an executive summary of this research, go to <http://www.instituteofcoaching.org/index.cfm?page=breakingresearch>. For the original article, go to <http://www.familyresourcecenters.net/our-publications/working-strategies/working-strategies-fallwinter-201213-articles/>.

For more information about the live coaching process, please contact Norma Guerrero at (714) 953-4455 Ext. 629.

Bio

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Marta M. Shinn, PhD, is a licensed child psychologist and research scientist at Child Guidance Center in Orange County, CA. Her research interests include childhood obesity, coaching psychology, and the assessment of mental health interventions for underserved child populations, delivery of evidence-based therapeutic interventions including Parent-Child Interaction Therapy (PCIT) and Trauma-Focused Cognitive-Behavioral Therapy (TF-CBT), and PCIT training. Dr. Shinn is a faculty member of the Department of Child and Adolescent Studies at California State University, Fullerton and serves as a Psychology Subject Matter Expert for the California Board of Psychology developing the state licensing exam, and was a collaborating investigator for the DSM-5 field trials.

