



Ensuring Program Fidelity: Best Practices



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Today's Topics

- Introduction to Fidelity
- Adaptations
- Monitoring Fidelity
- Fidelity to Environmental Strategies

As prevention providers, what is in your control?

- Knowledge of you community/target population and their needs.
- Identifying evidence-based strategies (programs, policies, practices) to meet those needs.
- Delivering those strategies with fidelity.

*Outcomes are not in your control. You can contribute to outcomes by delivering the most appropriate strategies to you community—**and delivering them well.** You do not control outcomes (but you should still monitor them).*

Fidelity of Implementation

- Definition: Fidelity of implementation is “the degree to which teachers and other program providers implement programs *as intended* by the program developers.”
- Research has shown that high fidelity to the program is associated with improved student outcomes.
- A high-quality implementation of a less promising program may be more effective than a low-quality implementation of a best practice program.

Dusenbury, L., Brannigan, R., Falco, M., & Lake, A. (2004). An exploration of fidelity of implementation in drug abuse prevention among five professional groups. *Journal of Alcohol and Drug Education*, 47(3), 4-19.

Components of Program* Fidelity

1. Adherence
2. Dosage/Exposure/Duration
3. Quality of program delivery
4. Participant responsiveness/engagement
5. Program differentiation/specificity

* We use the term “program” broadly to refer to a specific program, curriculum, intervention, or strategy.

Dane, A. V., & Schneider, B. H. (1998). Program integrity in primary and early secondary prevention: Are implementation effects out of control? *Clinical Psychology Review, 18*, 23–45.

Ennett, S. T., Haws, S., Ringwalt, C. L., Vincus, A. A., Hanley, S., Bowling, J. M., & Rohrbach, L. A. (2011). Evidence-based practice in school substance use prevention: fidelity of implementation under real-world conditions. *Health Education Research, 26*(2), 361-371. doi:10.1093/her/cyr013.

Gresham, F. M., Gansle, K. A., & Noell, G. H. (1993). Treatment integrity in applied behavior analysis with children. *Journal of Applied Behavior Analysis, 26*, 257–263.

O’Donnell, C. L. (2008). Defining, conceptualizing, and measuring fidelity of implementation and its relationship to outcomes in K–12 curriculum intervention research. *Review of Educational Research, 78*, 33–84.

Adherence

- How well did we stick to the program?
- Was the program delivered consistently across different teachers and settings?
- Did we deliver all the expected content?
- Did we use the format and materials identified by the program developers?

Adherence is often used interchangeably with fidelity but is just one component of fidelity.

Dosage/Exposure/Duration

- Does the schedule allow the program to be delivered for the recommended dosage/duration/frequency (e.g., are the number of sessions delivered consistent with the program plan)?
- Is the facilitator regularly available to support instruction?
- Is the participant regularly attending the program?
- Did any factors prevent the participant from receiving the intervention as intended?

Dosage is often measured at the participant level, rather than at the session level.

Quality of Program Delivery

- Does the facilitator have the necessary training, knowledge, and skills to deliver the intervention correctly?
- Are quality teaching practices used consistently and with appropriate intensity across all sessions?
- Are different learning styles taken into account?

Participant Responsiveness/Engagement

- How attentive and involved are the participants in the program?

This component of fidelity is least in your control. But you should pay attention to it and modify as needed. If you feel certain programs are not eliciting responsiveness, consider alternatives.

Program Differentiation/Specificity

- How well is the program defined and different from other programs?
- Was only one program delivered to participants at a time?

Numerous Factors Affect Implementation Fidelity

- Community in which implementation occurs and the fit with the program
- Organization(s) responsible for implementation
- Program support systems (e.g., training and TA)
- Characteristics of providers
- Program participants

James Bell Associates (2009, October). Evaluation brief: Measuring Implementation Fidelity. Arlington, VA: Author.

Q&A: Introduction to Fidelity

- *What aspects of fidelity (adherence, dosage, quality, responsiveness, differentiation) are most challenging for you?*
- *What factors affect implementation fidelity the most for you?*
- *Questions for me?*

Adaptation: Fidelity Meets Reality

- Some modifications to a program (intended or otherwise) will inevitably be made
- Some adaptation may be necessary and possibly beneficial, (e.g., the addition of an activity or a change in materials to address cultural context).
- Flexibility in implementation can also increase program ownership and involvement, thus resulting in longer program life.

Adaptation

The deliberate or unintentional modification of a program through:

- 1) deletions or additions (i.e., enhancements) to program components (e.g., to content, materials, activities);
- 2) modifications to the nature of the components; or
- 3) changes in the manner of administration or intensity (i.e., amount or duration) of program components.

Balance Between Fidelity and Adaptation

- Intervention developers may not have had opportunity to cover all local conditions.
- It may be beneficial—even necessary—to adapt programs to fit local conditions, cultures, or events (**think COVID!**)
- Adaptations should be thoughtful and justifiable (**why is an adaptation necessary?**)
- Adaptions are likely to be more successful if they add to the program rather than subtract from a program

Beware of Program Drift

- In a study examining Life Skills Training, researchers found that while all teachers made adaptations, most were negative changes that detracted from curriculum objectives.

Easy as Pie (or Cake)

- Implementing a program with fidelity is like baking a cake
 - Follow the recipe, step by step
 - Add ingredients in proper order
 - Bake at the required temp and duration
- Adapt if warranted
 - Your oven runs hot: cook at lower temp or shorter time
 - Recipe includes nuts but someone has nut allergy: Skip the nuts
 - Skipping the baking powder = poor outcome
 - Extra chocolate is always good

Q&A: Adaptations

- *Under what circumstances have you needed to make adaptations? (**How have you adapted since the pandemic began?**)*
- *What kinds of adaptations have you made?*
- *Questions for me?*

Monitoring Fidelity/Program Implementation

- You can only implement well (with fidelity) if you pay attention to it.
- Monitoring fidelity *is as important* as monitoring outcomes. (**Why? Think about what you control.**)
- The assessment of fidelity is particularly important when programs are implemented in real-world settings where program drift is common.

Why Should Fidelity Be Measured?

- Program Planning, Management, and Improvement
 - Provides a roadmap for implementation planning
 - Identifies aspects of implementation that work well and don't work well
 - Identifies barriers to implementation and ways to overcome them
 - Provides feedback to facilitators/providers about aspects of implementation that work well and can be improved
- Evaluation
 - Describes program implementation
 - Helps explain why the program achieved expected outcomes and—more important—why it didn't?
 - Helps explain variation in outcomes across sites.

Methods for Monitoring Fidelity*

- Direct observations in person
- Direct observations via video recordings
- Facilitator self-assessments after each session
- Facilitator self-assessments after completing a program cohort (e.g., a classroom)
- Facilitator self-assessments after completing a larger program cycle (e.g., across multiple classrooms)

** In descending order of resource intensity.*

Tools for Monitoring Fidelity*

	Adherence	Dosage	Quality	Responsiveness	Differentiation
Fidelity Checklists	X				X
Ratings of Quality			X		
Ratings of Participant Responsiveness				X	
Attendance Data		X			

** The most comprehensive fidelity assessments will include all these tools.*

Fidelity Checklist: Useful Tool for Assessing Fidelity

- Fidelity checklists are usually program specific
- Fidelity checklists include all the elements of a program that should be delivered
- Program developers often have fidelity checklists available that are specific for the programs
- In the absence of developer checklists, checklists can be created based on the content of the program

Lesson Components		Circle One	
Fidelity Check Lesson 3: Understanding Your Feelings 2			
I. Review:			
1. Reviews at least 1 topic from last week's lessons (e.g., defines emotion, describes comfortable vs. uncomfortable feelings, points out that emotions are tied to certain situations)		Yes	No
II. Introduction:			
2. Identifies purpose of lesson is to learn appropriate ways to express feelings.		Yes	No
<u>Activity A:</u>			
3. Conveys that emotions communicate how people feel.		Yes	No
4. Points out that there are different ways to show feelings.		Yes	No
<u>Activity B:</u>			
5. Identifies at least 2 emotions and common actions associated with them (e.g., happy = smile more, feel good inside...etc).		Yes	No
6. Points out that inappropriate expression can hurt yourself or others.		Yes	No
7. Points out that appropriate expression can be respectful and/or safe (not hurt others).		Yes	No
III. Positive and Negative Examples of Showing Feelings			
8. Places Supplement 3.1 (overhead) on overhead.		Yes	No
9. Reads through at least 4 of the examples.		Yes	No
10. Places Supplement 3.2 (overhead) on overhead.		Yes	No
11. Has students identify an emotion and then appropriate and inappropriate ways to express that emotion using Supplement 3.2.		Yes	No
IV. Practice Situations and Examples			
12. Passes out Supplement 3.3 (handout) to students.		Yes	No
13. Places Supplement 3.4 (overhead) on overhead.		Yes	No
14. Has students get into small-groups and work on activity.		Yes	No
V. Closure/Homework Handout			
15. Reviews at least 2 ideas/topics from the lesson.		Yes	No
16. Passes out Supplement 3.5 (homework).		Yes	No
17. Goes over directions with students on Supplement 3.5		Yes	No
Totals:		___/17	___/17

Fidelity Checklist (continued)

- Ideally, use one checklist per program session
- Offers a reminder for steps in program implementation
- Some checklists may offer method to record necessary adaptation to program implementation
- Checklists can be used by observers or facilitators (self-assessments)

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<u>Activity A:</u>			
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Remember, fidelity checklists capture only some elements of fidelity.

Alternatives to Program-Specific Fidelity Checklists

- Agencies may want to assess fidelity across multiple programs using the same tool (so program-specific checklists cannot be used)
- Generic fidelity questions can be used, such as...
 - Was all the program content of the delivered?
 - Did the length of the sessions match that of the program guidance or curriculum?
 - Did the frequency of delivery (sessions) match the guidance/curriculum?
 - Were the sessions delivered in the same order as the guidance/curriculum?
 - Were the materials or handouts the same as in the guidance/curriculum?
 - Was the format of delivery the same as the original design (e.g., peer-led, interactive, lecture)?
 - Were modifications made to the curriculum?
 - Were participants engaged?

Agencies must often balance specificity of measurement with pragmatic considerations

Q&A: Monitoring Fidelity

- *Do you formally monitor fidelity?*
- *What aspects of fidelity do you monitor (adherence, dosage, quality, responsiveness, differentiation?)?*
- *What tools do you use?*
- *How do you use your fidelity data?*
- *Questions for me?*

Monitoring Fidelity for Curriculum-Based Programs vs. Environmental Strategies*

- Many curriculum-based programs are scripted, have manuals, or provide extensive details about the elements of the program (**high differentiation**).
- In contrast, many environmental strategies do not provide such detailed guidance, making it hard to monitor fidelity.
- Nevertheless, fidelity can and should be assessed for environmental strategies.

** Environmental strategies modify and manage environments (or gatekeepers) in ways that discourage risky behaviors (or encourage healthy behaviors). They are often laws, policies, or regulations that need to be publicized and enforced. Examples include minimum age drinking laws, responsible beverage server training programs, and merchant compliance checks.*

Tips for Monitoring Fidelity for Environmental Strategies

- Identify core components of an environmental strategy (search published literature and reports*) and commit to implementing them
- If information on core components is not available, ask the following questions to develop a list of core components:
 - What partners are necessary to implement the strategy?
 - What resources are necessary to implement the strategy?
 - What steps are necessary to implement the strategy?
 - Are there related elements that are critical for success (e.g., media and enforcement mechanisms)
- As with curriculum-based programs, monitor whether core components were implemented

**PIRE has resources that identify the core components of many environmental strategies.*

Q&A: Fidelity and Environmental Strategies

- *Has anyone struggled with implementing environmental strategies?*
- *Do you feel you have clear guidance on how to implement environmental strategies? If so, from where?*
- *Questions for me?*

Final Thoughts

- Implementing evidence-based programs with fidelity is a best practice
- Assessing fidelity is critical for implementing with fidelity (how do you know you did it if you do not pay attention to it?)
- Assessing fidelity is not a test or a “gotcha” moment—it is a learning opportunity and helps ensure that we are delivering services in the most effective way
- Fidelity assessment is as important (probably more important) for program management and good service delivery than it is for evaluation purposes

Wrap Up

- Final questions?
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