

Neuvokas perhe (Smart Family)

Suomi, Finland

Short summary description of the practice

Overweight in children is a growing public health challenge. Child welfare clinics and school health care reach almost all families with children living in Finland. This allows for the implementation of information and support for families. However, based on literature we know that providing information alone is not a sufficient way to support lifestyle changes. The Smart Family method has been developed in collaboration with an interdisciplinary steering group and a multi-professional working group to provide joy, enthusiasm, and encouragement for health promotion to families. Scientific evidence and professional experience in the fields of nutrition, medicine, physical activity, behavioural science, and early childhood education have been taken into account in the Smart Family tools, website and guidelines for lifestyle counselling. An ongoing dialogue, especially with public health nurses and families, has been at the heart of the development.

Overall goal and specific objectives

The overall goal of the Smart Family intervention is to promote healthy lifestyles in families with children and to prevent obesity. Smart Family aims to provide tools: to help public health nurses and other professionals to bring up lifestyle issues with families without arousing guilt; for public health nurses to encourage families to identify their strengths in their health habits; for families to assess their health habits, and to encourage families to identify their strengths in health habits and help them find out if they would like to make changes in their health habits.

Indicators

Indicators of the data for which are systematically collected are:

- the number of municipalities using the Smart Family method, and health professionals being educated to use the method;
- feedback given by nurses and other professionals using the method;
- number of visits at web pages;
- awareness of the Smart Family by families with children.

The specific research questions in the intervention study by Kinnunen et al (2018) were, whether Smart Family method is able to increase: families' perceived autonomy support in lifestyle changes; self-efficacy for healthy eating, physical activity and everyday hassles; willingness and intentions for lifestyle change (actual changes made).

Target population

Families expecting a baby, families with under school-aged children (aged 0-6 years), families with primary school-aged children (aged 7-12 years), health professionals working with families with children, especially public health nurses at maternity and child welfare clinics and at schools.

Methodology

Smart family tools include a Smart Family card for a family, a picture folder for professionals and web pages for families and professionals. One day education by Finnish Heart Association for tool use is highly recommended for professionals working with families. The card includes claims of nutrition and physical activity for mother, father, and the child. There are also statements about smoking, tooth brushing and sleep. The purpose of the card is to provide a tool for families to assess their health habits. The card informs families of their own health habits and encourages them to spot their strengths in health habits. The card enables families to choose the topics of discussion at nurse's appointment.

For a health professional, the card serves as a tool to open discussion about family's views of health habits. The card enables professional to find the strengths in their clients' health habits. It also helps professionals to facilitate families in their own consideration what they find important and how that could be achieved by building on family's strengths. The picture folder for professionals helps to identify the themes brought up by families and incorporate them into daily life.

Main outcomes

As one of the Government's key project (2017-2018) it was possible to expand the Smart Family method to cover all municipalities in Finland. Since the launching of the Smart Family (year 2008), in total about 5000 health professionals, the most of them are public health nurses, have been educated to use the method. Based on the feedback collected systematically, professionals working with families with children are satisfied with the Smart Family tools. By year 2019, municipalities had ordered about 370 000 cards (also digital version available). Web pages are popular among families with children and professionals. In 2020, there were 213 000 visitors in contents targeted to families and 30 000 visitors in those for professionals. A work approach based on support for autonomy is an integral part of the successful use of the Smart Family method. In the intervention study (Kinnunen et al 2018), differences in the responses between the intervention and control groups were related to the identification of family strengths. When the Smart Family method was used, respondents felt more strongly that the nurse made visible and acknowledged the family's existing strengths in healthy lifestyle.

National funding

Using the Smart Family method does not require any extra resources for public health nurses since it is integrated in their everyday work. Municipalities need to cover expenses for education. The development and launching of the method by Finnish Heart Association has been funded by Funding Centre for Social Welfare and Health Organisations (STEA, under Ministry of Social Affairs and Health). These external resources are further needed for keeping the method, materials and website updated and for communication, etc.