Family Foundations: An Innovative, Effective Approach for Promoting Parent and Child Well-being

Conference Theme: Supporting Parents Through Programmes and Practices

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ABSTRACT: Family Foundations (FF) helps prepare couples for parenthood by fostering attitudes and skills related to positive parenting teamwork (“coparenting”). The approach is based on decades of research indicating that couple relationships and conflict—and especially the coparenting dimension of couple relations—strongly predict child mental health and adjustment, yet the coparenting aspect of couple relations influences family functioning and parent and child well-being. In addition to fostering parenting teamwork, FF also covers topics including emotion regulation (via mindful awareness and cognitive retraining), temperament, secure attachment, and positive parenting.

The Family Foundations Class Series consists of 4 class meetings before birth, and 4 classes after birth. The classes are conducted by a male/female co-leader team.

Childbirth Plus combines Family Foundations with standard childbirth education and preparation, and consists of 5 prenatal classes and 4 postpartum classes.

Training for program facilitators consists of a total of 3.5 days, with follow-up videotape review and coaching.

Outcomes. A decade of NIH-funded research indicates that FF produces positive outcomes, including:
Decreased Preterm birth; low birthweight; Infant, mother post-birth hospital stay; Parental stress; Parent depression & anxiety; Harsh & physically aggressive parenting; Conflict and violence between parents; Child emotional & behavior problems;
Increased Cooperative parenting teamwork; Parenting sensitivity & warmth; Infant self-regulation -attention control, sleep, self-soothing; Child social competence; School adjustment;
For certain outcomes, FF had the greatest benefits for families at higher levels of prenatal risk with risk defined by lower parent education, financial stress, father emotional security, mother depression, or couple conflict.

Independent Reviews of FF by expert commissioning panels in the U.S. and U.K. have resulted in high ratings for effectiveness, research rigor, and
dissemination, and the program has been adapted for a variety of special populations.