Using the RE-AIM Framework in Formative Evaluation of the EAT Family Style Intervention

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SUMMARY

This study presents the evaluation of the Ecological Approach to Family Style (EAT Family Style) Program across eight childcare centers that participated in the intervention. Findings highlight program effectiveness, adoption and implementation of the intervention, and the stakeholders’ intention to integrate key features of the EAT Family Style Program in their practices.

BACKGROUND

There is a limited implementation of evidence-based responsive feeding practices across childcare programs nationally.

The Ecological Approach to Family Style (EAT Family Style) intervention was developed to address barriers and challenges to implementing responsive feeding.

OBJECTIVE AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

To evaluate a responsive feeding intervention “EAT Family Style” through the Reach, Effectiveness, Adoption, Implementation, and Maintenance (RE-AIM) framework.

EAT Family Style is guided by the self-determination theory and includes an implementation strategy, evidence-informed responsive feeding practices and a research-based coaching model emphasizing goal setting, feedback, and reflection.

METHODS

Qualitative, cross-sectional design and semi-structured interviews with EAT Family Style participants.

After the completion of the intervention, all participants including childcare center directors, providers, and extension coaches participated in an exit interview about their experiences in the program. Semi-structured interviews were conducted, transcribed verbatim, and coded deductively by 3 coders using RE-AIM dimensions as a priori codes and placed into sub-themes and themes using thematic analysis.

Table 1. RE-AIM Definitions, Concepts Addressed, and Example Interview Questions

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dimension</th>
<th>Concepts Addressed and Example Interview Questions</th>
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<tr>
<td>Efficacy</td>
<td>- What are the important benefits achieved? - What was the impact of the intervention on important outcomes?</td>
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<td>Adoption</td>
<td>- Why did you choose to participate or not in the intervention? - What did you learn about children’s behavior?</td>
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<tr>
<td>Implementation</td>
<td>- How are the different components of the program delivered? - How did the goals of the program and methodology applied?</td>
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<tr>
<td>Maintenance</td>
<td>- What kind of changes do you plan to continue or discontinue the intervention for future program design? - What are the incentives we can give coaches that will have value for them to continue to implement this program?</td>
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RESULTS

Implementations describe program delivery of EAT Family Style. The four themes in this section focus on functions and components of the programs including adaptations and implementation strategies of childcare providers, center directors, and coaches.

Theme 1: Children: providers use different EAT Family Style responsive feeding practices in their classrooms, while center directors and coaches provide them support through administrative and coaching strategies. “If I’m not really engaging any new way and just see the normal words that come to your mind when you’re talking about food but really, really, really, really know and express the different types of food that were given to us in training, one or two of them, I was really great.” “I’m sure that I’m not doing this in my other program.” “My kids have a little bit of a gap in their skills.” “This was just something that really seemed like the right fit for me. Something I’ve been really interested in, so I was excited to try it and make it work.”

Theme 2: Children: childcare providers use different EAT Family Style responsive feeding practices supported children’s healthful development (i.e. skills for communication, socialization, and autonomy). “Any time they’re not asking for their pencil or anything else they’re getting better at not asking. They know when to stop it doesn’t keep popping out. They’re doing it in a better way with that. They’re getting the hang of how much to scoop up and everything, too. They ask for more than they need.”

Theme 3: EAT Family Style responsive feeding practices encouraged positive mealtime environment in the classroom. “It’s making the meal a whole lot easier because the (children) are not so anti-social waiting for me to get food to them. Because they’re watching everyone else and they’re catching and reminding each other. Oh, we’re only doing one scoop right now. And so we’re not having to do as many reminders and it’s doing a little bit smoother getting stuff out because we’re waiting. We’re watching everyone else while we’re not involved in just waiting for food to appear.”

Adoption highlights key features of the programs that stakeholders deemed to be essential in their decision to adopt the EAT Family Style in their sites. The three themes in this section describe how the program supports stakeholders’ beliefs, goals, and ongoing need for professional development.

Theme 1: EAT Family Style program aligned with coaches and center directors’ professional beliefs and goals. “Children choose to participate or not in the intervention of children’s health. One reason why I wanted to do was to make sure that we’re teaching children that it is important to sit down and eat from a plate and not having to worry about things you know, running around with food in your mouth and going from there.”

Theme 2: EAT Family Style program provided childcare providers and directors incentives at no additional cost, and professional development opportunity for coaches. “We gave the parents the ability to buy snacks. I thought the packages for my classroom. I used some of the money that we got to measure sizes and stuff in the water bowls. So that was a big plus.”

Theme 3: Children: providers and directors intend to continue using EAT Family Style responsive feeding strategies they perceived beneficial to children’s development and promote positive mealtime environment. “Having more food items, just in the classroom or like sensory stuff in a sensory table. Encouraging them, especially the ones that are a little more sensitive to individual needs.”

Maintenance describes the extent to which delivery of EAT Family Style Program can be potentially sustained and supported, both in the individual and state. The three themes in this section focus on how EAT Family Style is intended to be integrated in the childcare center practices and policies, as well as the professional routines of the coaches who used in the program.

Theme 1: Children: directors and providers intend to continue using EAT Family Style responsive feeding strategies they perceived beneficial to children’s development and promote positive mealtime environment. “My kids just like to have more food available to them. I’ve been really interested in it. So I thought it all went together really well.”

Theme 2: EAT Family Style concepts are intended to be maintained by including healthy eating strategies in the program’s mealtime practices.

Theme 3: Coaches: intend to continue their involvement in the program to build their professional skills and community network. “I really do like to do it in the future as well.”

CONCLUSION

Findings reflect EAT Family Style program efficacy specific to improvements in children’s overall dietary intake and the classroom mealtime environment.

Adoption of EAT Family Style program across participating sites is influenced by stakeholders’ beliefs, goals, and ongoing requirement for professional development.

This suggests support for developing or adapting programs that not only help to align professional development of practitioners, but also provide support for organizational goals and needs.

Findings reveal EAT Family Style program’s high potential for integration into childcare centers’ policies and practices, enhancing sustainability, program ownership and adoption.

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Figure 1. EAT Family Style Program: Seven Modules