

# Dialogues with Parents – welcoming, listening, empowering

Ana Teresa Brito<sup>1,2</sup>, Joana Espírito Santo<sup>2</sup>, Lina Teixeira<sup>2</sup>, Maria Raul Xavier<sup>2,3</sup> and Nair Azevedo<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Centro de Investigação em Educação, Ispa-Instituto Universitário, Escola de Educação, Lisboa, Portugal

<sup>2</sup> Fundação Brazelton/Gomes-Pedro para as Ciências do Bebê e da Família (FBGP), Lisboa, Portugal

<sup>3</sup> Research Centre for Human Development - CEDH, Faculty of Education and Psychology, Universidade Católica Portuguesa, Porto, Portugal

Dialogues with Parents is a Parental support program aimed at enhancing the relationship between parents and children and promoting the optimal emotional development of children, based on Touchpoints Model.

“The succession of Touchpoints in a child’s development is like a map that can be identified and anticipated. They are centered on caregiving themes that matter to parents (e.g., feeding, discipline), rather than traditional milestones”. (Brazelton and Sparrow, 2003, p.1)

The Touchpoints Approach has an established evidence base showing improved developmental knowledge by parents and providers, improved parent-provider relationships, and reduced parental stress (Ayoub & Vele-Tabaddor, 2018; Swartz & Easterbrooks, 2014).

The Approach proposes a shift of paradigm in the intervention with families: from prescription to collaboration; from objectivity to empathy; from linear to multi-dimensional and systemic understanding of development; from inflexible professional boundaries to flexible ones.

Based on the Brazelton Touchpoints Developmental-Relational Frameworks, the program applied strengths-based assumptions and relationship-based practices to underpin empathic and collaborative relationships with families, seeking to strengthen their confidence in parenting.

## AIM

- Understand the impact of an innovative approach supporting parents with identified social/emotional vulnerabilities.

## GOALS

- Promotion of positive parenting;
- Expansion of parents’ knowledge and skills;
- Enhancement of parent-child interactions.

## INTERVENTION

Community based, involving multiple and diverse stakeholders from the fifth most populous town in Portugal.

Two types of encounters with a modular structure - 10 modules from Prenatal-Newborn to 6 years (monthly, Saturdays, 9:30-12:20)

(a) Continuous Touchpoints Parents Group - the same group of parents participate in all 10 modules, following the whole child developmental process from prenatal to 6 years;

(b) Touchpoints 1 by 1 Parents Group - parents select according to their needs, namely the age of their children.

## METHODS

Parents were invited to apply based upon eligibility for family allowance support and/or other social support programs such as Early Childhood Intervention.

Eighty-nine (89) parents participated, with children from pregnancy to the age of 6, presenting identified risk factors across environmental, cultural, social, and emotional domains.

Mixed methods - qualitative and quantitative – were used to gather and analyze the impact of the program. Qualitative data will be presented; complementary information and data will be reported elsewhere.

## QUALITATIVE RESULTS

Qualitative data was gathered through record-keeping (RK) of parents talks, photographs, and a focus group (FG) with the Continuous Touchpoints Parents Group at the end of the Parental Support Program.

Parents voices translate the importance of the way in which parents were welcomed, listened, and empowered by facilitators, based on the Touchpoints Model Approach, as the *Encounters Agenda* presents.

Results emphasize parents’ positive statements about their opportunity to actively participate, the strong relationship with the facilitators and with other parents. Also, the usefulness of the encounter for themselves as a person and as a mother/father were particularly valued, as highlighted in *Parents Voices*.

## ENCOUNTERS AGENDA

### Introduction

*This is not a training for parents; this is dialogue with parents, embraced by the Touchpoints approach*

Trainers as facilitators – Parents as experts  
Berry Brazelton short biography

### Presentations & Group agreement

*What is important for this group to feel good and secure?*

**[Check-in for Continuous Parent Group - bringing the group back to a place where they have been, remembering a previous discussion or Touchpoints; relinking parents to each other and developing further dialogue]**

### Reflective group moment

Sharing experiences, memories, expectations, worries, joys, sadness, challenges, about each Touchpoint (0 to 6 years old)

Coffee break

### Brazelton Touchpoints: themes and opportunity

In close articulation to parents’ reflective work – picking up parents’ examples  
Anticipatory guidance - what awaits us...

### Satisfaction questionnaire



Welcoming

Listening

Empowering

## PARENTS VOICES

“That first day, we made our group contract, which gave us security, confidence and a very big union, a feeling of belonging.” (M1, FG)

“This bridge between facilitators and parents, many of whom have already passed through these ages and others who have not yet passed through the ages we spoke about, was really very enriching.” (M3, FG)

“More than learning about a theme, what I got out of the encounter was the emotion - I felt welcomed, listened to...” (M15, RK)

“There are guidelines but no recipes.” (F2, RK)

“It’s a lot about sharing and of course this whole framework of the Touchpoints and of listening to facilitators who have always been human and have always brought their stories and human side. I think this also unites, it also warms you up, it also brings you closer.” (M4, FG)

“We shared knowledge, techniques, and awareness, but above all, we also allowed ourselves to be human and bring a set of fragilities.” (M1, FG)

“We can know many things, can’t we? Cognitively knowing... But another thing is what we shared here! It’s really very different. I think that’s what makes all this so rich (...) I know that I may fail! To be able to say it out loud and receiving this acceptance from the group. Here, I can fail. Not that I want to, but I can! And I can look at that failure as a learning experience. How can it be different next time?” (M3, FG)

“I think that here we have learned that what we do with love, we do well. And I think that only in a space like this could happen. So, I think repeating this, countless times, for other parents to have these opportunities, would be incredible.” (M1, FG)

## REFERENCES

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