Child Adult Relationship Enhancement in Primary Care (PriCARE) Theory of Change: A Promising Intervention to Reduce Child Maltreatment

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Child maltreatment (CM) is a pervasive public health problem and there is a critical need for brief, effective, scalable prevention programs. Because problematic parent-child relationships lie at the core of CM, interventions targeting this relationship hold promise as CM prevention strategies. Evidence-based positive parenting interventions, as discussed here, are manualized behavioral interventions that focus on teaching caregivers positive parenting skills and techniques to improve the effectiveness of their parenting and improve their relationship with their child. In this article, we describe one specific parenting intervention, Child Adult Relationship Enhancement in Primary Care (PriCARE)/Criando Niños con CARIÑO, and review the proposed mechanisms through which PriCARE may contribute to CM prevention. PriCARE is a 6-session group parenting intervention for parents of 2-to-6-year-old children. PriCARE was developed and iteratively adapted with input from racially and ethnically diverse families, including low-income families, and was designed specifically for implementation in primary care with inclusion of strategies to align with usual care workflow to increase uptake and retention. PriCARE has the potential to reduce risk of CM directly through improving parenting behaviors and indirectly through the impact of those changes in parenting behaviors on child behaviors. PriCARE has also been shown to reduce parenting-related stress. Finally, by strengthening and bringing warmth to the parent-child relationship, PriCARE may buffer against the negative health consequences associated with CM and childhood adversity.

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