

This brief report summarizes a preliminary evaluation of ParentingMontana.org. For more detailed information, the full report is available at <https://bit.ly/3USnDtJ>.

Montana parents are finding helpful tips and practical advice for their everyday parenting needs on ParentingMontana.org.



Background

Developing social and emotional skills is critical for children and young people as these skills support successful educational and life outcomes, including graduating from high school and college as well as finding success in the labor market (Jones et al., 2015). Social and emotional skills are also protective against negative outcomes, such as substance misuse behaviors and arrests or other problems with the law (Durlak et al., 2011; Taylor et al., 2017). Social and emotional skills include thoughts, feelings, and behaviors and are described as non-cognitive skills that are involved in managing and understanding emotions, working with others, and persevering to achieve goals (OECD, 2015). The five categories of social and emotional skills are self-awareness, social-awareness, responsible decision making, self-management, and relationship skills (Zins et al., 2007).

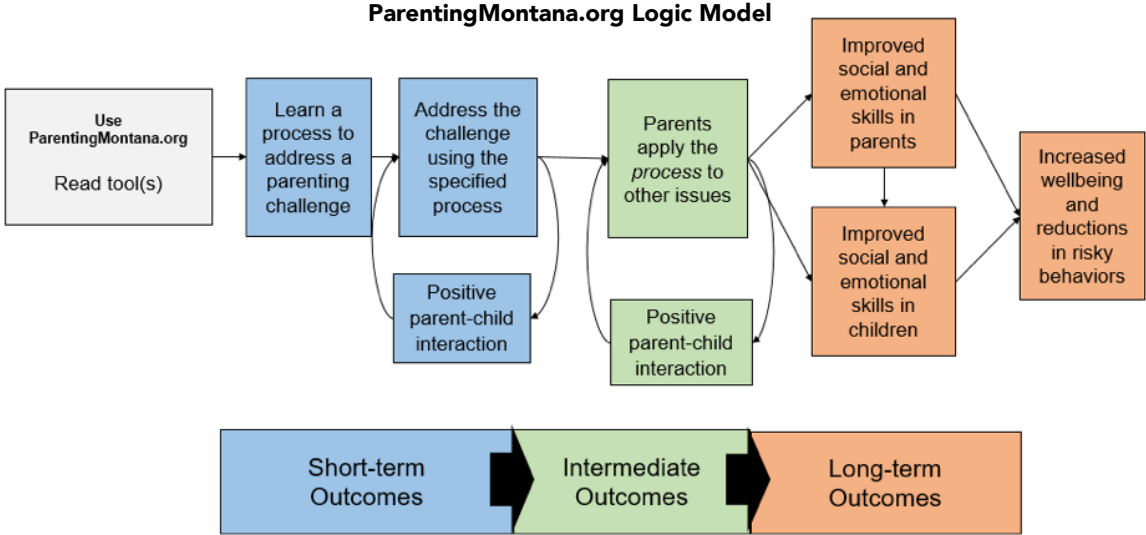
Many federal and state agencies involved in health, wellbeing, and childhood development have prioritized topics that are congruent with social and emotional skills, such as fostering mental, emotional, and behavioral development in children and youth (Office of Disease Prevention and Health Promotion, n.d.). Likewise, research in the U.S. and Montana has found that parents value and prioritize skills for their children such as being hard working, being independently minded, having good listening skills, and being respectful and confident, which are all examples of social and emotional skills (Center for Health and Safety Culture, 2020; Nomaguchi & Milkie, 2019).

Recognizing the importance of developing social and emotional skills of children and parents, the Center for Health and Safety Culture (CHSC) at Montana State University, along with numerous partners and stakeholders, created the website ParentingMontana.org. On the website, parents learn about strategies to thoughtfully address everyday challenges with their children while at the same time growing social and emotional skills, increasing wellbeing, and reducing risky behaviors. The website includes tools that are organized developmentally by the age of the child. Examples of tool topics include anger, bullying, confidence, discipline, routines, listening, lying, and friends. Each topic is different, with unique examples and suggestions. At the core of each of the tools is the ParentingMontana.org 5-step intentional parenting process.

ParentingMontana.org 5-Step Intentional Parenting Process

Step	Label	Description
Step 1	Input	Getting input is about purposefully creating an opportunity for a child to engage with you. With children and teens, it's about purposefully creating an opportunity to engage in a conversation. It is about truly hearing and valuing what they are saying.
Step 2	Teach	For children and teens, teaching is demonstrating how to do a task successfully. It also conveys the purpose. Teaching equips a child with knowledge and skills.
Step 3	Practice	Practice is about creating opportunities to try what they are learning, to sometimes fail, and to repeat their efforts. Through practice, a child grows their skills.
Step 4	Support	Support reinforces a child's ability to be successful in growing their skills. Support includes coaching, providing feedback, reteaching, monitoring, following through by applying logical consequences, and reflecting.
Step 5	Recognize	Recognize includes intentionally acknowledging a child's efforts and successes, no matter how small. Recognizing a child's efforts grows motivation for them to continue to improve.

The following logic model describes how the how the 5-step parenting process within a tool is expected to improve outcomes. Parents and those in a parenting role visit ParentingMontana.org to select an age-specific tool to address their parenting challenge. By reading or listening to an audio version of the tool, parents learn about and utilize the process to address their parenting challenge. If a positive parent-child interaction occurs, then the process is more likely to be repeated with the child. With use of the 5-step parenting process, parents become more comfortable and confident applying the process to other issues not currently addressed on ParentingMontana.org. With repeated engagement in the 5-step parenting process, social and emotional skills are improved in both parents and in children. Over time, improved social and emotional skills in children increase wellbeing and reduce risky behaviors.



Evaluation

To understand the value of ParentingMontana.org to date as well as examine the extent to which ParentingMontana.org is achieving its goals, CHSC collaborated with Dr. Kaylin Greene, PhD, associate professor of sociology, to conduct a multi-year evaluation. Four evaluation questions are addressed:

1. Is ParentingMontana.org valuable to users and stakeholders?
2. Can parents apply the ParentingMontana.org 5-step intentional parenting process to address their challenges?
3. Do parents become more comfortable and confident with the ParentingMontana.org 5-step intentional parenting process over time?
4. Is repeated engagement with the ParentingMontana.org 5-step intentional parenting process associated with improvements in the social and emotional skills of parents and children?

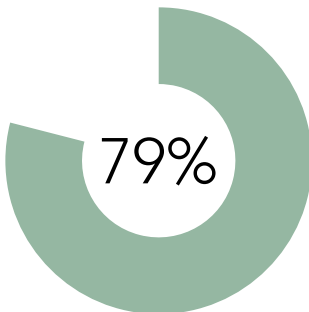


Data were gathered through multiple sources and in varying types, including both quantitative and qualitative. The mixed-methods data sources included web analytics data and value assessment survey data. Detailed data were collected from a group of parents who engaged with the website with the assistance of a parenting coach over a period of six months; the coaching data included notes from the ParentingMontana.org coach, interview transcripts, and survey data from parents about their individual skills, their child's social and emotional skills, and family relationships and wellbeing.

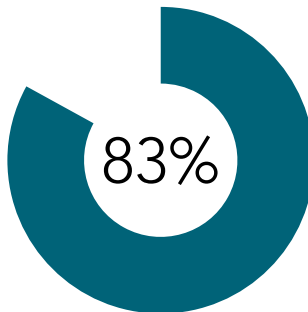
1. Is ParentingMontana.org valuable to users and stakeholders?

To date, ParentingMontana.org has reached a large and growing audience, with over 140,000 cumulative visitors near the end of 2021. In surveys, parents using the website reported viewing it as trustworthy and valuable and indicated they would recommend it to others.

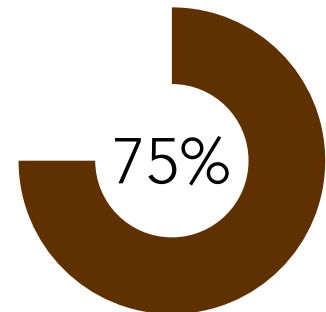
Information is very useful



Trust the information a lot



Very likely to recommend the website



Parents participating in the coaching sessions also clearly appreciated the website and found it valuable. These parents praised the helpfulness of website materials, the organization of the website that focused on developmental stages, and the thorough and detailed information in each tool. Some parents of older children or teenagers even lamented the fact that they had not had resources like this earlier in their parenting journey.

“I value all of the material and I believe that it works.”

“I just wish that I would have had this [ParentingMontana.org] since the beginning, you know? It's kind of like that book on how to be a parent.”

Certain components of the website were perceived as particularly valuable. The 5-step process, the audio files, and the printable materials were repeatedly mentioned as vital resources on the site. Indeed, participants liked the tone of the materials and were appreciative of the 5-step parenting process and how it provided an opportunity to parent fairly and respectfully.

2. Can parents apply the ParentingMontana.org 5-step intentional parenting process to address their challenges?

In interviews, all parents involved with the coaching sessions reported they had implemented some or all of the 5-step parenting process. When they started coaching sessions, none of the participants were familiar with the 5-step parenting process. Throughout their experience working with the coach and using the website, most parents reported using the 5-step process and multiple tools to address a variety of parenting challenges.

Overall, when participants tried to apply the 5-step parenting process – or pieces of it— in their own lives, it was generally a good experience. Negative interactions were uncommon; children did not seem to be actively resisting the 5-step parenting process. There were occasions when children “ignored” their parents, for instance, when the parents would seek input, but this was rare. In general, parents agreed that the 5-step parenting process helped them communicate thoughtfully with their children. For some participants, implementing the 5-step parenting process (or pieces of it) led to positive interactions and immediate behavior changes in their children (e.g., willingness to help with the chores). However, sometimes it was a little harder for parents, and they had to engage in additional discussions or institute more reminders or practice to bring about positive behavioral changes in their children. Nonetheless, after some time, parents could reflect on the coaching and the 5-step parenting process and see important changes. All interviewed participants reported some positive impacts.



“Things have changed with her, like, 360 degrees...The attention she does get is not negative attention anymore; it’s mostly positive attention.”

Most participants thought that it was relatively easy to apply the 5-step parenting process and website information in their everyday lives with their children. Yet, parents sometimes had trouble remembering all five steps. Nonetheless, parents found it helpful to have a process to guide their interactions with their children.

“I have never once remembered all 5 of them, I’ll be honest with you. But I felt like even if I hit 1 or 2 steps, at least I’m making progress for sure.”



3. Do parents become more comfortable and confident with the ParentingMontana.org 5-step intentional parenting process over time?

While many parents felt unsure about the process and using a new approach when they first started coaching and using ParentingMontana.org, practice and repeated use helped parents feel more comfortable and confident.

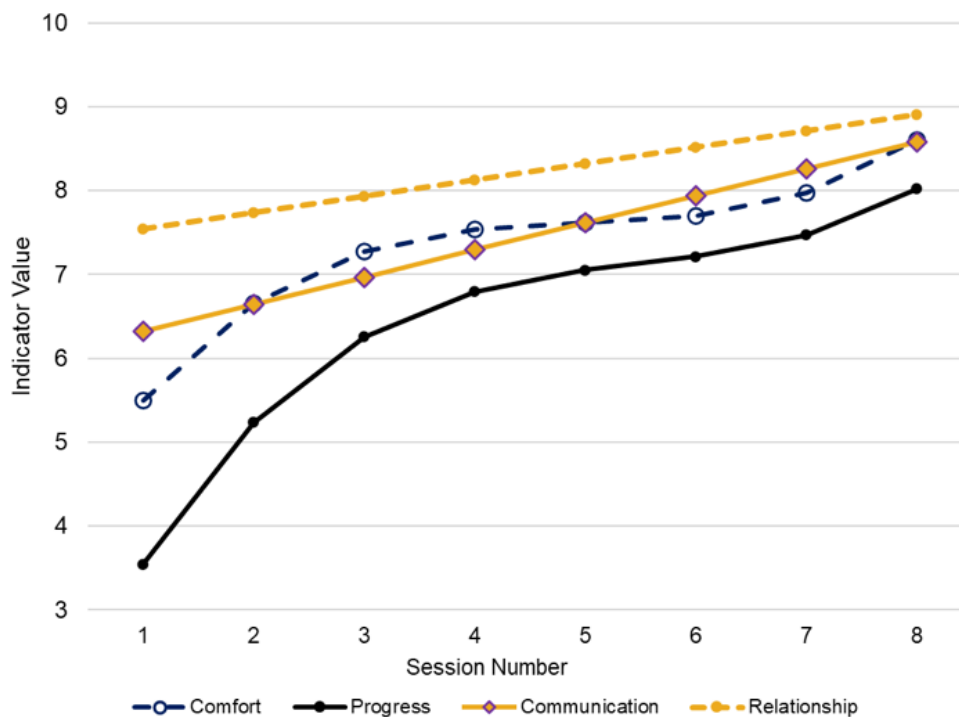
“It’s a little bit daunting at first to try and learn a process.”

Parents noted seeing benefits and gaining confidence quickly, and positive interactions with their children while using the process reinforced their efforts.

“At first, it [the parenting process] was more of a challenge because I was unfamiliar. But after I recognized the benefits, then it was easy to be on board with it. And I had to overcome some of my own challenges, and that would just be like, ‘This isn’t what I’m used to doing’... Just being more intentional. But I 100 times recognize the benefit of that. It’s just huge.”

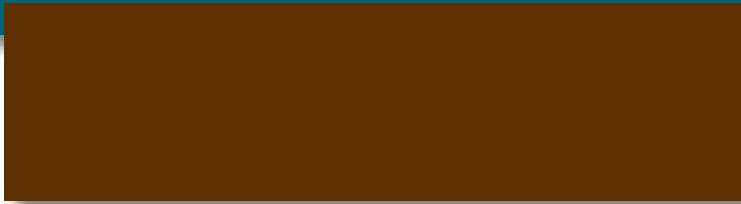
Increasing confidence was reflected in parents’ survey responses as well. As coaching sessions progressed, parents reported greater comfort with the process, progress on their parenting issues, and improvements in communication and relationship with their child.

Parents Improved Their Relationship Quality and Communication With Their Children and They Became More Comfortable With the Process and Made Progress on Their Challenge



“Once you learn the tool, you can apply it to anything. So, if you start with some common issues of parenting, then I think that you can fine-tune use that same tool in some other—like, maybe more specific or more special— areas of parenting.”

“The more natural it [the parenting process] becomes, the more you can just apply it.”



4. Is repeated engagement with the ParentingMontana.org 5-step intentional parenting process associated with improvements in the social and emotional skills of parents and children?

Parents described a range of improvements in their children’s social and emotional skills and perceived important behavior changes in their children. Many parents noted that these changes happened quickly after implementing the 5-step parenting process. Examples included children taking more initiative and demonstrating responsibility, such as completing tasks or following family rules without being asked repeatedly.

“The same week I started using those tools or doing things differently, she changed. She decided that she wanted to do her homework when I was working... so she started doing it by herself and was motivated... When we [parents] are calm, when we have the time to talk... they feel more connected, and they do things because they want to do them not because I said it.”

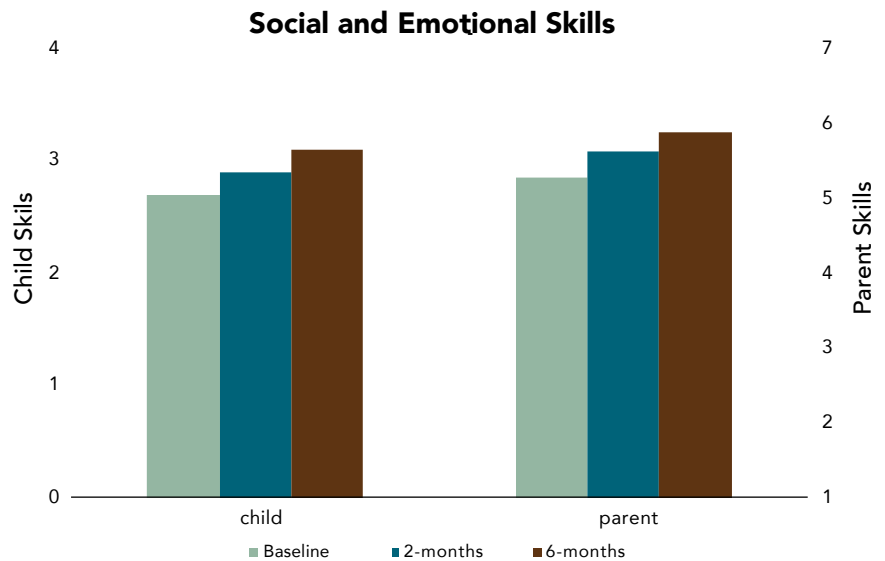
Parents also noted growth in their children’s communication skills and ability to recognize their own and other’s emotions.

In addition to children’s social and emotional skill development, in many cases parents also described their own growth in social and emotional skills. Using the 5-step parenting process was specifically linked to parents’ growth in social awareness and relationship skills. Many parents mentioned getting input (step 1) as a fundamental shift in their interactions with their children and that simply having a process helped them to slow down and be more thoughtful.

“The whole concept of asking for my child’s input has really made a difference here in my house. That was not something that I used to do until I started the coaching sessions. Basically, now I always start by asking him, ‘What do you think? What do you think you can do here?’ Really just trying to get his thoughts around what he thinks would be helpful. That has made a huge difference.”

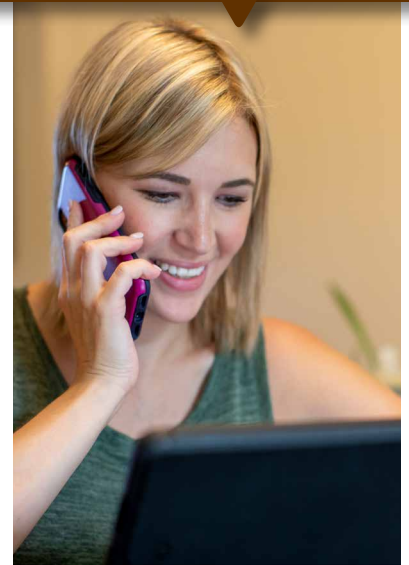
Surveys of parents about their own and their children’s social and emotional skills also showed growth over time.

“I like that it gives me a play by play so I can literally go through in my mind and try to remember. Okay, what was the next step? That gives me a chance to look into myself, calm down a little bit, and work my way through the steps.”



Conclusion

Results of the preliminary evaluation demonstrate that users of ParentingMontana.org find the site and its contents very useful and parents who used ParentingMontana.org reflected positive experiences using the tools and process provided by ParentingMontana.org. Importantly, parents reported gains in their own social and emotional skills as well as those of their children. Future evaluation activities will provide additional information on the outcomes associated with ParentingMontana.org.



Note: Detailed information on the evaluation methods and analyses is available in the full report.

<https://bit.ly/3USnDtJ>

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