Tailoring a Physical Activity Promotion Program for a Rural Area

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Tailoring a Physical Activity Promotion Program for a Rural Area

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Abstract

The VERB™ Summer Scorecard (VSS) program was designed with the purpose of promoting physical activity among ‘tweens’ (8-13 year olds). A unique aspect of the VSS program is the scorecard which serves multiple purposes. The scorecard primarily serves as a behavioral reinforcer for promoting physical activity. The scorecard also tracks physical activity for each participant. The current community-based intervention (CBI) approach was taken to adapt the VSS to meet the needs of a rural, diverse population in the southeastern United States. Formative research was conducted with the target audience. Focus group interviews were conducted with parents and their children. Content analysis showed significant changes were needed for program. Previous versions of the Scorecard did not test well with the target audience, who suggested the use of smaller Scorecards and fobs as a secondary reinforcer. These changes offer many potential benefits to participation reinforcement and physical activity promotion tracking.

Introduction

A lack of physical activity is not only associated with increased rates of obesity, body fat composition, and mortality among young people (Kozluczka et al., 2006), but also contributing factor to increases in certain types of cancer (Ehman et al., 2012). Although the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) recommend 60 minutes or more of physical activity per day, only 18.4% of public school students reach this goal (CDC, 2010). Many schools fail to implement physical activity promotion programs for young people due to a lack of parental and student involvement (Cardon et al., 2012). Even with the added resources of university, physical activity promotion efforts still face many challenges (McDermott et al., 2009). The challenges of promoting physical among school-aged youth are exacerbated as students become older. Nader, Bradley, Houts, McRitchie, and O’Brien (2008) tracked youth from ages 9 to 15 and found that moderate-to-vigorous physical activity significantly declined each year. School-aged youth in rural areas suffer from poor health outcomes due to disparities in resources such as access to community and recreational facilities (Cornwell, Hawley, & St. Romain, 2007).

METHODS

Sample and Data Collection

Two parent focus groups (N = 14) and two child focus groups (N = 12) were conducted by trained focus group facilitators for the current study. The parent and child focus groups included a diverse sample of participants. Twelve African-American parents and two Caucasian parents participated in the parent focus group and 10 African-American and two Caucasian children participated in the child focus groups. Both groups of participants were recruited through the local Boys and Girls Clubs. The lead community partner in the VSS program development. Each focus group facilitator used a focus group guide to conduct the focus groups with parents and children. The guides covered aspects of VSS that might need adapting to work for the target population, including price, product, place, and promotion. The transcripts were coded specifically to reflect the constructs.

RESULTS

Based on the common themes identified in the formative research, major adaptations were needed to implement VSS in the rural community. The major program adaptation highlighted changes needed to the use of the Scorecard within the community. Two versions of Scorecards that had been used in other states were tested with youth and parents (see Figure 1). Neither version tested well. Parents believed that youth would not be willing to read or understand them and would ultimately lose them. Youth participants also discussed the difficulty of reading and understanding the previously used Scorecards.

Option for the Scorecard discussed by parents was a chain with fobs (dog tags). This option tested well with both parents and youth. The use of fobs is a familiar practice within this community. One of the local elementary schools uses ‘dog tags’ as a classroom incentive and according to the focus group responses are very popular among the local youth.

Parent 1: Yeaa, you used to do the tags at a [local school] so well... as well because you we did add a tag to the chain and they were proud of that thing [dog tag].

Parent 4: Yeaa my kids were about [sic] to fight over a tag, ‘I got to [sic] do such and such so I can get my tag bear’.

Nine times out of the ten of reading the tag of the VSS program, they’re not going to be able to do so. You want something that they can actually read and actually relate with.

Parent participants also agreed that if a paper Scorecard were to be used, the Scorecard needed to be smaller and something ‘tweens’ could carry with them such as ‘wallet size’ or ‘pocket guide’ (see Figure 2). During both of the children’s focus groups, the participants asked about the ‘dog tag’ feature. All participants supported the idea.

When asked why the ‘dog tag’ was preferred, the child participants agreed it was because “you get to wear it.”

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REFERENCES


