



# breaking the cycle

## *healthy families massachusetts sets young parents up to succeed*

In an effort to continue to strengthen Healthy Families Massachusetts by studying its impact, the Children's Trust followed up on an initial quasi-experimental program evaluation by working with Tufts University to conduct a rigorous randomized control trial of the program.

The results show that the program is having significant impact in numerous areas and is benefiting the young parents and children it serves.

The Children's Trust oversees Healthy Families Massachusetts, a nationally-accredited, home-based family support and parent coaching program for first-time parents age 20 and under across Massachusetts.

Turn to the back page of this document for more information on the evaluation, the study sample, Healthy Families Massachusetts, and the Children's Trust.

### evaluation highlights

#### healthy families massachusetts is:

- significantly lowering parents' risky behaviors, which likely reduces children's exposure to traumatic events
- significantly lowering participants' parenting stress, a risk factor for child abuse and neglect
- significantly increasing educational achievement, paving the way toward self-sufficiency

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a children's trust program

# healthy families massachusetts: proven results

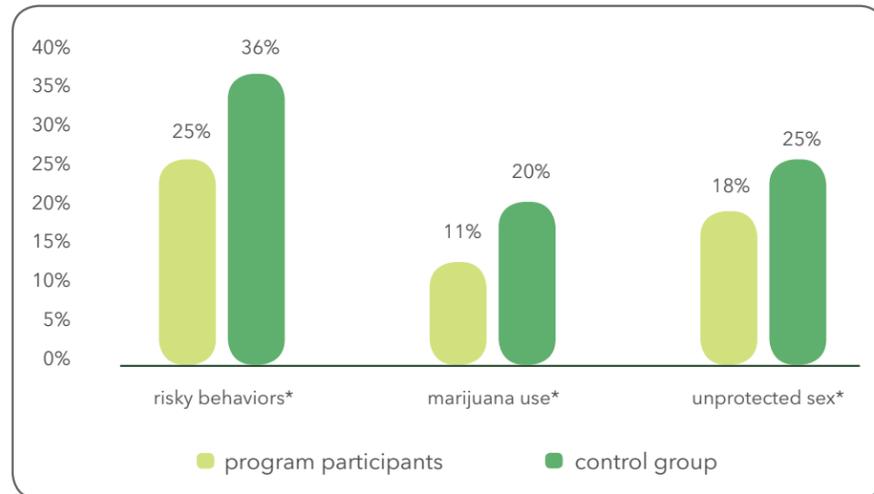


## reduces violent, impulsive, and risky behaviors among adolescent parents

The evaluation findings provide evidence that the program has a positive impact in areas of critical importance for adolescent parents.

### mothers in the program:

- were less likely to engage in impulsive and risky behaviors, such as abusing alcohol, tobacco, or drugs
- were more likely to report using protection against pregnancy and sexually transmitted diseases



note. \* $p < .05$

## improves family self-sufficiency

Evaluation results revealed a significant effect on program participants' educational achievement, which potentially has a long-term impact on family income and self-sufficiency.

### just two years after enrollment, mothers in the program:

- were nearly twice as likely than those in the control group to report finishing at least one year of college

Given that a majority of similar studies focused on high school attendance, the findings from this study cover new and exciting terrain.

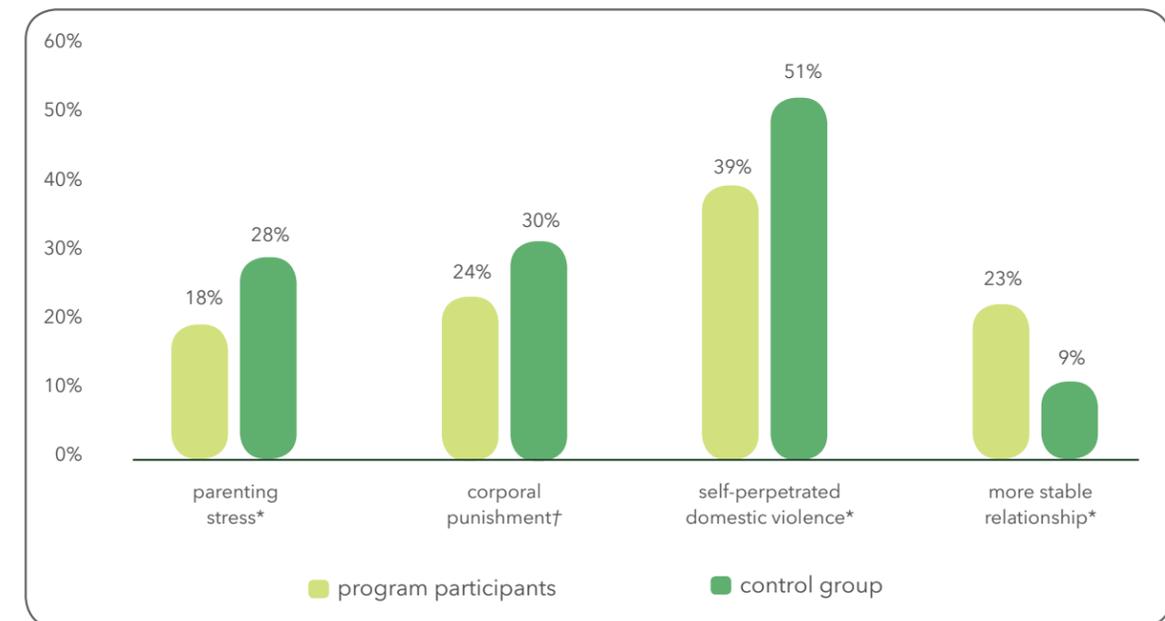
A previous Tufts University process and outcome study of Healthy Families Massachusetts showed that 83 percent of program participants were either enrolled in school or had graduated at a rate significantly higher than identified in national studies and 70 percent of those who were not in school when they enrolled in the program had returned to get their high school diplomas.

## promotes safe and healthy homes

The evaluation proves that the program is successful at helping young parents create safe and stable home environments for their children by helping to promote healthy relationships, keep everyone in the home safe, and reduce children's traumatic experiences, including witnessing violence.

### mothers in the program

- were more likely to transition from unstable relationships to supportive, residential partnerships with the father of the baby, that included higher levels of father involvement
- had less parenting stress, a risk factor for abuse and neglect
- were less likely to perpetrate intimate partner violence
- were less likely to use corporal punishment



note. \* $p < .05$ , † $p < .10$

## helps the most vulnerable families

The evaluation shows evidence that the program is having significant impact helping even the highest-risk parents and children.

- program participants with higher levels of trauma used less corporal punishment compared with mothers in the control group, suggesting that the program can help even the most vulnerable mothers learn more positive parenting strategies
- program participants with higher psychological vulnerability gave birth to healthier newborns than mothers in the control group

## about the children’s trust and healthy families massachusetts

The Children’s Trust is Massachusetts’ leading family support organization. We strengthen the Commonwealth by developing, evaluating, and promoting parenting education and coaching programs to improve the lives of children.

Healthy Families Massachusetts is a Children’s Trust program. This intensive, evidence-based family support and parent coaching program matches young parents with trained professionals who provide information and guidance starting in pregnancy and continuing through the child’s third birthday. The program is designed to help parents learn the skills they need to be successful in their new role and create safe, stimulating environments for their children.

## about the study

Started in 2007 and conducted by evaluators at Tufts University, the Massachusetts Healthy Families Evaluation–Phase 2 is a longitudinal randomized controlled trial (RCT) evaluation of Healthy Families Massachusetts (HFM).

Participants were recruited from 18 HFM programs from across the state, including a mix of communities with diverse populations. Eligible participants were randomly assigned either to the program or the control group. A total of 704 mothers (61%, n = 433 program; 39%, n = 271 control) participated in evaluation activities (response rate of 84%), which included, at a minimum, an initial phone interview or a data release allowing access to administrative public agency data. A subgroup of mothers (approximately 70%) also participated in 2-2.5 hour semi-structured interviews and completed additional standardized measures.

Intent to treat (ITT) analyses, the traditional–and most stringent–approach to examining program effects in randomized clinical trials, were used to compare outcomes between the program group and the control group based on random assignment status, regardless of whether young mothers in the program group took up the assigned treatment (i.e., received services).

For additional details on this research, visit: <http://ase.tufts.edu/tier/publications/>

## about the study sample

The study sample was comprised of first-time mothers, the overwhelming majority aged 19 or younger. This is significant because adolescent parents are simultaneously managing difficult transitions to both adulthood and parenthood during a life stage when the brain is still forming. In addition, most of these young mothers were facing a variety of challenging life circumstances. 61% of these mothers received HFM, 39% received referrals and information only.

