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Abstract

This paper describes a new paradigm for addressing threats of school violence. We advance a family-centered approach to supporting students to address the contextual characteristics of school violence and promote collaboration among families, school personnel, and students. We present a case study that demonstrate the utility of this family-centered approach. We conclude by articulating practice and research implications for using this family-centered approach as a primary avenue to increase school and community safety and to improve social-emotional outcomes for students.

Keywords: family-centered, family-school collaboration, school violence

Promoting Family-Centered Support Assessment and Intervention

School violence is a pressing public health concern. Students who make and carry out threats of violence are at risk for negative long-term outcomes (Musu et al., 2019). In addition, victims of violence suffer negative outcomes over time (Musu et al., 2019). School responses toward violence and threats of violence frequently emphasize zero-tolerance policies that use exclusionary discipline, perpetuate outcome disparities, and do not include families (Cornell, 2018; Skiba et al., 2011). An assessment and intervention response that involves partnering with families when students threaten school violence is essential to understand the ecological conditions contributing to violence and to engage the student and family in the assessment and intervention process. The Family Check-Up is a school or community-based, brief, and adaptable program that leverages motivational interviewing to promote engagement in evidence-based assessment and intervention that is centered on student and family goals (Stormshak & Dishion, 2009). Decades of research on the Family Check-Up suggest that engagement in the intervention is associated with improvements in parenting and student behavior through young adulthood (Connell et al., 2007, 2012, 2016; Stormshak et al., 2011). The purpose of this paper is to describe how the Family Check-Up can be used by school-based consultants in a threat assessment process to improve social-emotional outcomes for students.

School Violence in the U.S.

Data from national reports and empirical investigations points to a need to better address school violence in the U.S. A joint report by the National Center for Education Statistics and the Bureau of Justice Statistics (Wang et al., 2020) reported 66 school shootings in the 2018–19 school year. During the 2017–18 school year, 71% of public schools reported one or more incidents of violence, with 21% reporting one or more serious violence incidents, such as a

physical attack or robbery with a weapon. During the 2016–17 school year, 42 school-associated violent deaths took place. Results from the 2019 Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance System study by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention found that approximately 20% of high school students had been bullied at school and 22% had been in a physical fight in the previous 12 months. In another study, nearly 12% of students reported being threatened with harm by another student in the previous 30 days, with 9% reporting that the threat was carried out (Nekvasil & Cornell, 2012).

The prevalence of school violence and the many school shootings in the last decade have highlighted that school violence poses a significant public health concern, with great social and economic costs. In addition to youth incurring negative psychological effects, school violence and threats of violence contribute to poor school climate and compromise students', parents', and teachers' feelings of safety (Eisenbraun, 2007). Safety concerns contribute to students' avoidance of school, which may lead to lost instructional time and have cascading negative consequences for educational success (Musu et al., 2019). Society incurs economic costs when students are removed from public schools and enrolled in alternative educational facilities, rehabilitation programs, or juvenile detention centers due to violent behavior (Anderson, 1999; Macmillan, 2000). School violence can also have high economic costs for victims, which includes students as well as school professionals (e.g., health care, counseling; Musu et al., 2019; Wang et al., 2020).

Public reactions to school shootings and other incidents of school violence have prompted schools to implement costly building security measures. Such security measures include fences around the school perimeter, high-tech video surveillance, metal detectors, as well as law enforcement deployment to schools (Cornell, 2020). Although these measures may calm

parents and teachers, no evidence shows that they reduce school violence (King & Bracy, 2019). Zero-tolerance policies that include unconditional suspension, expulsion, or police referral for even a minor infraction are also commonly implemented by schools in response to violence. Zero-tolerance policies do not consider the context and meaning of a student's behavior (Cornell, 2020). For example, prior skill-building progress, family-school relationships, and a cultural context are not addressed. These policies contribute to a high degree of racial disparities in schools. Black and Latinx students are consistently suspended at higher rates than their White peers (Skiba et al., 2011), increasing their probability of contact with the juvenile justice system in comparison to White students (Council of State Governments Justice Center, 2011). Moreover, schools with a high percentage of minoritized students are most likely to employ zero-tolerance policies (Sparks, 2011), without evidence that rates of violence are higher in these schools. In addition, because suspension and expulsion increase disconnection from school, academic failure, delinquent activity, and arrest, these practices indirectly link students to the juvenile justice system (Krezmien et al., 2014). In addition to promoting a "school-to-prison-pipeline trajectory" for minoritized students (Kim et al., 2010), zero-tolerance policies that rely on punishment rather than intervention increase inequities in access to social, emotional, and behavioral health services (Skiba et al., 2014). The over reliance on suppression policies and practices tends to criminalize, stigmatize, and psychopathologize youth. Instead, evidence suggests a need to better understand the context surrounding the threats of violence and to use an ecological framework to build systems of support for the student.

Recommended Guidelines to Address Threats of Violence

School-based threat assessments (TA) are recommended as best practice to address threats of school violence and to offer an alternative to zero tolerance policies. Guidelines for

conducting a TA include a risk assessment, a response plan, and a safety plan (Cornell, 2020). Guidelines suggest school-based TA teams include an administrator, mental health professionals (e.g., school psychologist, social worker), and law enforcement (e.g., school resource officer). An immediate response to substantiated threats typically includes protecting intended victims, developing plans to resolve conflicts, and carrying out disciplinary measures. Following the immediate response, a safety evaluation can include mental health screening and community referral, law enforcement investigation, and a safety plan to reduce risk. If a student is not receiving special education services, a referral may be made (Cornell, 2020). The TA risk assessment itself includes interviewing the student who made the threat, as well as any individuals associated with the threat, such as intended victims and witnesses. After the risk assessment, the TA team determines the threat's seriousness. At this stage, a threat may be resolved as transitory if it is due to an intermittent expression of anger, if the student retracts the threat, or if other means are used to determine that the threat is not serious. If the threat is determined to be substantiated, it is treated as a serious threat of harm. Substantiated threats include threats of serious harm to an individual or individuals, such as threats to fight, rape, or injure with a weapon. Most substantive threats occur in middle school (Cornell, 2020).

Limitations with Recommended Guidelines to Address Threats of School Violence

Although school-based TA is more effective than zero-tolerance policies to address school violence (Cornell, 2020), there are several limitations of current TA guidelines. One limitation is that there is a lack of a systematic protocol to meaningfully include the family of the student who made the threat; however, research suggests that intervening with families is the most effective way to decrease violence, aggression, and long-term problem behavior in schools (Stormshak et al., 2009). Omitting the meaningful involvement of the student's family can harm

each step of the TA process, from conceptualization to intervention. For example, students that threaten school violence may have a history of victimization and trauma (Cornell et al., 1987; Dishion & Patterson, 2016; Langman & Straub, 2019). Moreover, because violence is contextual (Jakob, 2016), students referred for TAs often have histories of family problems and conflict (e.g., violence in the home; caregiver substance use; Langman & Straub, 2019). Collaborating with parents is essential to understand the impact of prior victimization, trauma, and family conflict on student threats of violence, as well as to learn about approaches already in place to support the student and their family (Jaycox et al., 2018).

Another reason to actively engage families refers to safety planning. Student access to weapons increases the lethality of violence and is a primary factor in determining the seriousness of the threat. Family management of guns and other weapons is a key aspect of a safety plan (Bonanno & Levenson, 2014).

Finally, parent exclusion may decrease student engagement in the TA. A line of work suggests that parent exclusion from school services may undermine family engagement and may reduce options for intervention, which could inadvertently increase danger (Dishion & Kavanagh, 2003; Stormshak et al., 2009). When TAs and subsequent interventions fail to consider the family and home context and do not involve family members, ineffective practices that risk public safety and perpetuate outcome disparities across race/ethnicity are likely to continue (Skiba et al., 2014).

Other limitations to common school-based TA protocols are related to the inclusion of law enforcement in school policies and practices. The presence of law enforcement can risk criminalizing youth behavior that could be more effectively managed using less extreme school disciplinary practices. In addition, students from minoritized populations are more likely to be

arrested by school police relative to White students, yet there is no evidence students of color exhibit higher rates of behavior problems (Office for Civil Rights, 2018). Students with disabilities are also disproportionately impacted, with evidence suggesting that they are disproportionately referred to school police or arrested at school (Office for Civil Rights, 2018). These limitations suggest a need to re-conceptualize the TA process and re-orient it toward supports and strengths rather than consequences.

Another limitation of a school-based TA is the positioning of the process on a student who is labeled as a threat. Labeling a student as a threat perpetuates the use of stigmatizing language that harms students (Weist et al., 2019). In addition to re-focusing the school-based TA process to include families and contextualize student behavior, the school-based TA process should be humanized, focusing on students as individuals rather than threats. This focus on humanizing the process addresses symptomology second to the student's position as an individual. Treating students as threats misses opportunities to understand student strengths, family assets, student goals, and family aspirations. In fact, it is through understanding student and family strengths and goals that positive change can occur (Dunst et al., 2007). Such an approach is in opposition to common school-based practices that are characterized by negative and problem-focused communications with families and students that can increase emotional and behavior concerns and further separate families and educators (Garbacz et al., 2018).

Based on limitations of school-based TA guidelines that decontextualize an assessment and intervention process from the family and student, and perpetuate stigmatizing language, we believe a re-framing of the TA process is necessary. Fortunately, school-based consultants, such as school psychologists, social workers, and counselors, are equipped to embed family centeredness in a school-based TA process in a manner that centers on family voice and

experiences to understand relevant contextual factors and strengths, build positive home-school relationships, and create collaborative systems of support across home and school.

The Family Check-Up

The Family Check-Up (FCU; Dishion & Stormshak, 2007; Stormshak & Dishion, 2009) is a school or community-based, family-centered model for students and families developed to target proximal risk factors, such as parenting and family management practices, that predict later youth problem behavior (Dishion et al., 2016). The FCU is brief and offers tailored services to meet the unique needs of families. The FCU is assessment-driven and includes empirically based conceptualization of family strengths and challenge areas. The FCU's strengths-based approach in conjunction with the use of motivational interviewing elicits caregiver motivation to engage in the change process and to improve parenting and family management skills (Miller & Rollnick, 2002). The FCU includes three primary stages: an initial interview, an ecological assessment, and a feedback session with follow-up sessions implemented based on family goals (see Figure 1). A FCU consultant facilitates the FCU process with caregiver(s) and supports their use of family management practices to support social-emotional and learning goals for a child who is the focus of the FCU.

The FCU begins with an **initial interview** to assess family strengths and challenge areas, motivate caregiver engagement in the FCU, and to gauge readiness to change. The FCU consultant focuses on building rapport**,** enhancing caregiver commitment to the change process, increasing perceptions that change is important, and building caregiver confidence that they can change. The aims of the session are for the consultant and caregiver to arrive at a shared perspective about family strengths and challenge areas and for the consultant to prompt the dynamics critical to the change process, such as motivation and self-appraisal (Dishion &

Stormshak, 2007; Miller & Rollnick, 2012).

After the interview, caregivers complete an **ecological assessment** that includes questionnaires and may include videotaped observation of family interaction tasks (e.g., problem solving, strengths and goals; Dishion et al., 2002). The ecological assessment includes norm-referenced questionnaires that the family completes and other optional tailored assessments, such as videotaped observations of family interaction tasks. The questionnaires focus on the broad domains of (a) family sociocultural context including social support, parent mental health, partner support, and stress; (b) child behavior and emotional adjustment; and (c) family management including parenting, parent-child relationship quality, and family conflict. The family interaction tasks are semi-structured parent-child interactions of 4 to 5 minutes in duration. Interactions are rated for positive parenting and parent-child relationship quality, which are key family management practices targeted by the FCU.

The family next participates in a collaborative and strengths-based **feedback session** that is tailored to family goals and their context, delivered using motivational interviewing processes. Emphasizing family strengths within a motivational interviewing framework can serve as a catalyst for family change by reducing defensiveness and empowering caregivers to make changes relevant to their family's goals (Collins et al., 2004). The FCU consultant uses motivational interviewing strategies to reframe caregivers' appraisals of the child and the problem. Within this framework, the FCU consultant aims to increase motivation to change behavior by exploring ambivalence and resistance to change through empathy. The goals of the feedback session are to (a) share assessment findings with family members, (b) engage caregivers in a motivation-enhancing discussion to promote positive changes, and (c) collaborate with parents to identify intervention goals and follow-up services to meet these goals, which

most often include sessions in positive parenting using the *Everyday Parenting* curriculum (Dishion et al., 2011). The feedback process involves a comparison of the family's results to normative data to initiate a discussion of current areas of strength and areas that need attention. For ease of presentation the facilitator plots the assessment findings on the Child and Family Feedback Form along a color-coded visual continuum ranging from "area of strength" (green) to "needs attention" (red; with yellow in between). The feedback was designed to motivate caregivers to maintain current effective practices, while reducing parenting practices and parent-child interactions that undermine healthy child adaptation. Because follow-up services are tailored and responsive to families' contextual factors, they can also address family resource needs (e.g., housing supports), thus strengthening the family system to help the student. Adaptive and tailored approaches like the FCU streamline service delivery, reducing cost and time-related barriers to family engagement.

Everyday Parenting (*EDP*) is a skills-based curriculum based on the Parent Management Training–Oregon Model that focuses on core areas of parenting and family management (Dishion et al., 2016). *EDP* sessions and the schedule for their delivery are tailored to the family's specific needs and readiness. Caregivers are viewed as the primary agents of change and they are empowered with the skills needed to effectively improve family management practices. A unique feature of the FCU process is the flexibility of the *EDP* curriculum. Unlike most parenting curricula, for which optimal dosage is the full curriculum, *EDP* is modular, and delivery can be customized for each family. Intervention materials include instructional videos and worksheets to support parents' accurate use of evidence-based parenting and family management strategies.

Summary of FCU Outcome Research

The FCU was iteratively developed in a series of randomized trials with children and their families (Dishion & Andrews, 1995; Dishion & Kavanagh, 2000). Notably, families most in need of services (e.g., those from high-conflict homes, those whose children have behavioral problems) engaged more consistently in the FCU (Pelham et al., 2019). Due to the FCU's assessment-driven, collaborative, and tailored nature, the FCU optimizes engagement of culturally diverse families to prevent problem behavior and improve parenting across multiple cultural groups (Boyd-Ball & Dishion, 2006; Smith et al., 2014).

The FCU has been rigorously evaluated across developmental periods. Early childhood intervention trials demonstrated intervention effects on self-regulation, language skills, and child behavioral problems at school entry (Dishion et al., 2008; Lunkenheimer et al., 2008). Effects improved as children received increased dosage over time (Dishion et al., 2014; Stormshak et al., 2018). An adaptation of the FCU at the kindergarten transition showed statistically significant reductions in later emotional and behavior problems (Garbacz et al., 2020). Notably, the FCU benefited caregivers' proximal parenting strategies, which in turn improved later child behavior (Stormshak et al., 2020).

Findings for the FCU are particularly robust during middle school, with effects on later antisocial behavior (Connell et al., 2012; Stormshak et al., 2011), as well as improvements on family variables, such as family conflict, that put students at greater risk for exhibiting violent behavior (Van Ryzin et al., 2012). Additional analyses show that middle school students who engaged in the intervention had reductions in arrest rates through age 17 (d = 0.75; Connell et al., 2007), and increases in grade-point average (d = 0.39) and attendance (d = 0.37) into Grade 11 (Stormshak et al., 2009).

Family Check-Up Adaptations and their Effectiveness

Given the FCU's strong empirical support, there have been several adaptations of the intervention model, and evaluations of these adaptations have supported their effectiveness. For example, an adaptation of the FCU for online delivery was implemented and evaluated with middle school students and their families (Stormshak et al., 2019). Evaluation results supported significant improvements on key outcomes, such as child social-emotional behavior, effortful control, parenting self-efficacy, and parent confidence in dealing with problem behaviors, with outcomes moderated by risk in the expected direction (e.g., higher risk was associated with greater improvements). Moreover, implementation data show that caregivers were highly engaged in the intervention.

The Family Check-Up 4 Health, an adaptation of the FCU designed to specifically target health behaviors (e.g., nutrition) and intended for delivery in primary care settings, was also recently evaluated. Results showed that the intervention significantly improved child health behaviors and that these changes were mediated by improved family management practices (Berkel et al, 2021; Smith et al, 2021). The FCU was also adapted for use as a classroom wide consultation model (i.e., Classroom Check-Up; Reinke et al., 2008) designed to provide classroom-level support by targeting teachers' motivation to maintain classroom management practices that promote student competence and success while reducing teacher-student interactions likely to exacerbate problem behaviors. Consistent with the FCU, the Classroom Check-Up involves assessment, feedback, and identifying and implementing classroom interventions likely to promotes teachers' use of effective classroom management strategies. The effects of the Classroom Check-Up with and without visual performance feedback to teachers were evaluated. Results indicated that the Classroom Check-Up with visual performance feedback was effective in increasing teachers' use of effective classroom management strategies

that decreased classroom disruptive behavior.

Adapting the FCU for School Threat Assessment and Intervention

Decades of research on youth violence and aggressive behavior suggest that youth and their parents and other stakeholders, such as teachers, can develop maladaptive interaction styles whereby a child's verbal and physically aggressive behavior is inadvertently reinforced through coercive interactions and negative reinforcement (Patterson, 1982). Parents and teachers may react with fear and anxiety about potential dangers (Bradshaw et al., 2006), which can lead to ineffective behavior suppression strategies (e.g., exclusionary discipline). These strategies interfere with an assessment-driven response to the threat of violence and further marginalize students and families from school (McIntosh et al., 2020), blocking the student from necessary supports. Research findings indicate that effective behavior support and behavior management strategies, which are key to the FCU, can disrupt maladaptive interaction styles, improve peer relationships, reduce behavior problems, and promote social-emotional competencies (Capaldi & Patterson, 1996; Swaim et al., 2006). Embedding the empirically based, family-centered FCU within TA practices may be instrumental in managing and de-escalating violent threats and in reducing school violence. Due to positive findings for adaptations of the FCU across context and developmental period, an adaptation of the FCU for a school-based TA holds promise for reducing school violence through promoting family-centeredness, family-school support, and student skill building.

We adapted the FCU to align and integrate with a school-based TA. We named this adaptation a Family-Centered Support Assessment and Intervention. This name removes "threat" from the process. This name is based on limitations of common school-based approaches to TA, as well as guidelines for school-based TA. In addition, this name acknowledges a rich research

base on family-school communication (e.g., Strickland-Cohen & Kyzar, 2019) that suggests the importance of how names, terms, and labels are used with families, and emphasizes supportive and positive approaches. In addition, our adaptation process has included collaborating with our school partners, and they recommend this new term and a shift away from "threat."

Table 1 depicts the adapted FCU, the Family-Centered Support Assessment and Intervention, with the standard three-session FCU and tailored follow-up services aligned and integrated within a TA protocol (Cornell, 2018) for use with substantiated threats of violence. Before the initial interview with the family, the FCU consultant joins the school TA team and gathers information about the presenting challenges. During the initial interview, the consultant talks with families about safety and risk behaviors (e.g., access to weapons, preoccupation with violence), as well as contexts specific to violence and aggression (e.g., victimization history). The FCU consultant uses a family-centered approach to understand family dynamics and to learn about their experiences with the school.

The ecological assessment in the Family-Centered Support Assessment and Intervention adds domains relevant to risk factors (e.g., trauma assessment) and contextual planning (e.g., safety planning, school coordination), which are then added to the feedback report. During the feedback session, findings from the ecological assessment are reviewed to prompt discussions about home-school partnering around positive behavior support and coordinated support and safety plans. The strengths-based, family-centered approach focuses on parent engagement, parent empowerment, and parent efficacy as agents of change in implementing effective parenting strategies and partnering with the school. Concurrently, the FCU consultant provides guidance to the school TA team about family support and family-school partnering to build their capacity to engage with the family (Mapp & Bergman, 2019). Thus, in addition to sessions with

the family, the consultant meets with the school team to prepare for two partnership-centered sessions that include the family and school team; the first of these sessions occurs after the feedback session and the second occurs two weeks later to check-in about progress toward goals.

Family-Centered Support Assessment and Intervention Theory of Change

We developed a theory of change to depict the action-oriented process, whereby a Family-Centered Support Assessment and Intervention can promote goal-directed change (see Figure 2). Based on prior FCU research, the Family-Centered Support Assessment and Intervention process may be able to reduce the negative impact of risk factors by promoting positive family management and parenting practices, leading to improved social-emotional competencies and reductions in serious violence over time. Specifically, family stress and conflict limit caregivers' abilities to use effective parenting strategies at home and to collaborate with their child's school, leading to early behavior problems, which can impede behavioral control and amplify over time (Box A). In addition, student trauma history, prior victimization, and problems with peers can limit social and behavioral competencies, leading to serious behavior problems toward adults and peers (Box A). Through the Family-Centered Support Assessment and Intervention (Box B), parents are engaged in the collaborative and motivationally oriented ecological assessment and intervention model that leads to effective family management/parenting (Box C) and improved home-school communication and collaboration (Box D). Moreover, through alignment and integration with school-based TA (Cornell, 2018), school-supported management is established by creating supportive, safe, and promotive environments (Box E). Improvements in family management, such as monitoring and supervision with limit setting, home-school collaboration, and school management, such as behavior support planning with safety plans, lead to reductions in externalizing behavior and

threats of harm, as well as to improvements in peer relationships and social and behavioral competencies (e.g., behavioral control, problem-solving skills; Box F).

Examining Family-Centered Support Assessment and Intervention through a Case Study

To illustrate the Family-Centered Support and Intervention process, we next present a case study to depict the process with one family. A university child and family clinic collaborated with a school to use the adapted FCU in the context of TA. A school contacted the clinic after threats were determined to be substantive based on the school's knowledge of the clinic and the clinic's reputation for managing complex circumstances. At the time of referral, the school had already initiated a TA process, but had not invited parent participation in the TA. During the initial contacts, school personnel reported a contentious relationship with the family.

The student who was the focus of the process was an 11-year-old fifth-grade multiracial male. The student's primary caregiver was his mother. The mother worked directly with the FCU consultant to better understand ecological factors, strengths, and goals, as well as to decide on support plans and evaluate progress toward goals to support the student. The FCU consultant in the case study is the second author and a doctoral-level clinician with decades of experience implementing evidence-based interventions with children and consulting with families in schools, community, and institutional settings. The consultant is a certified FCU therapist, as well as a FCU trainer and clinical supervisor.

The school wherein the child was enrolled was an elementary school with the town: fringe locale designation, indicating that the area where the school was located was inside an urban cluster that is less than or equal to 10 miles from an urbanized area (National Center for Education Statistics, 2019-2020). The school was classified as a Title I school and had a total enrollment of approximately 365 students. Based on data from the National Center for Education

Statistics (2019-2020), approximately 85% of students at the school were White, 11% were Hispanic, and 2% were two or more races. Forty-three students were eligible for a free or reduced-price school lunch.

Physical violence against a younger, female peer precipitated the student's suspension and TA. The At the time of referral, the student expressed homicidal and suicidal ideation with reports of hallucinations, and he engaged in self-injurious behaviors. The principal expressed concerns about the family's access to weapons. School staff and the mother reported a strained home-school relationship, with school staff questioning parent motivation to address their child's presenting concerns.

During the initial interview (see Stage 1 in Table 1), the FCU consultant gathered information about family goals, strengths, and presenting concerns. In addition, a plan was created for collecting social, emotional, and contextual information during the ecological assessment. The mother reported that the student experienced auditory hallucinations with messages to "kill things or people." The mother also noted that the student experienced visual hallucinations that included seeing people who had died. The mother reported that she and her mother also had similar experiences of seeing people who had died. During interviews with school staff, the principal shared concerns that the mother was not taking seriously the events that had transpired at school, nor the auditory and visual hallucinations the student reported experiencing.

Stage 2 included data collection and beginning to plan for intervention and evaluation (see Table 1). In addition to ecological data collected as part of the standard FCU process (i.e., measures that assess family socio-cultural context, child behavior, and family management), additional data were added for this case based on primary goals identified by the school and

during the initial interview. A broad-band measure was added to assess for the presence of mental health concerns (e.g., hallucinations). In addition, the FCU consultant modified and implemented the school district threat assessment with the mother to assess for contextual and risk behaviors, such as the availability and use of weapons by the student and family members, violence in the home, changes in threats and behavior over time (e.g., moving from verbal threats to physical attacks), and social supports. Also, videotaped observations of the caregiver and child completing semi-structured interaction tasks (see Dishion et al., 2002) were examined to determine the extent to which the caregiver and student interacted in positive, productive, and supportive ways (e.g., caregiver support for the student, student compliance with caregiver instructions).

Ecological assessment data suggested family-level risk factors, including (a) poverty and financial stress; (b) housing instability; (c) student recreational gun use; and (d) family history of mental illness, including maternal history with bipolar disorder, depression, anxiety, and post-traumatic stress disorder. Other risk factors were a poor parent-child relationship, as well as the mother's ineffective limit setting and limited use of positive behavior support. Individual-level risk factors included the student's poor emotion-regulation and problem-solving skills, feelings of isolation, and interest in violent activities. Family strengths included the mother's partner who lived in her community and participated in the FCU with her, parental monitoring, and that the mother did not use any substances. Although guns were on the premises, the assessment found that they were in a locked safe. Student strengths included success in academics, positive behavior at home, and some positive prosocial peer relationships.

During Stage 3, a feedback session was conducted, and plans were coordinated across home and school. In the feedback session, the FCU consultant shared assessment results and

identified intervention goals with the family. Goals for the mother included strengthening limit setting, parental monitoring, and use of positive behavior support, as well as improving parent-child relationship quality. Student goals were to improve problem-solving strategies and coping skills. To improve the home-school connection, which was another intervention goal, the mother and school staff implemented a behavior support plan. An overall goal for the support plan was to move away from a previous focus on suppressing behavior concerns to promoting and teaching positive behavior. The plan included (a) school staff and the mother using positive behavior support to reinforce the student's prosocial behaviors and skillful management of strong emotions, (b) a home-school incentive system, and (c) daily check-ins between the mother and the school. The mother and school staff also focused on identifying and reinforcing instances of the student engaging in independent problem solving, and appropriate requests for a break. To promote positive peer relationships and decrease the student's sense of isolation, the school implemented positive peer reporting strategies, which incentivized the student to continue prosocial behaviors. In addition, ongoing safety planning included the mother committing to monitoring that guns stay stored in a locked safe, terminating recreational activities involving guns, and conducting random searches of the student's property.

Community services included a psychiatric referral for the student to assess the need for medication and a therapy referral for the mother to address her mental health needs. In addition to defining home and school plans to support the student, during Stage 3, the consultant also defined with the mother and school personnel procedures the consultant would use to support their implementation of the mutually agreed upon strategies. During Stage 4, the FCU consultant conducted follow-up sessions with the mother, which focused on supporting the mother in maintaining contact with the school, coordinating support across home and school, and

supporting the mothers' implementation of the behavior support plan.

Positive outcomes were reported by the mother and school staff after family engagement in the support process. For example, school staff reported that no further school disciplinary events occurred through the end of the subsequent school year. The mother and student reported ongoing positive connections to the school, and increasingly positive interactions with school staff. The mother also remained connected to a school counselor for continued support implementing the behavior support plan. In addition, the mother reported a decrease in the student's internalizing symptoms, and she reported that she had learned how to effectively manage her own mental health symptoms and reported improved well-being.

Summary

This case study describes how a family-centered and supportive process can be implemented in the context of a school-based TA. Anecdotal outcomes of the case study suggest that the collaborative and motivation-oriented FCU may be effective at engaging parents in an evidence-based approach to assessment and intervention within the TA, motivating parents to use research-supported parenting strategies, and creating effective and positive home-school partnerships. In this case, the FCU was integrated into the school-based TA, and home and school plans were developed during the feedback session that included safety measures and approaches to strengthen parenting and school positive behavior support.

We present this case study as a demonstration for how the FCU can be adapted to fit a TA, promote family engagement and family-school connections, and support students in developing positive behaviors and skills. Although the case study provides one example of the FCU process, it is of course not an empirical study. In addition, the FCU consultant in the example who worked with the family and school had many years of experience and expertise in

the FCU. Therefore, how ecological assessment data were conceptualized and used for support planning with the family and school should be considered within the context of an expert and experienced FCU consultant.

Implications for Schoolwide Family Centeredness

Embedding a family-centered approach into a school TA addresses several limitations of existing TA procedures. Specifically, it adds a systematic approach for including the family, addressing contextual features of violence, centering on family voice and experiences, and building the capacity of school personnel for collaborating with the family. Through these approaches, families and students who may have been negatively impacted by school discipline policies and practices can begin to rebuild and avoid a further deterioration of relationships with school personnel, and school personnel are encouraged to reflect on their use of discipline practices and build skills in family collaboration.

Embedding systematic collaboration with families into a school TA is useful, yet it does not explicitly address broader schoolwide policies, systems, and practices. The individualized approach to family-centered support advanced herein may be most effective in the context of a school that aligns and integrates family-school collaboration into school policies, systems, and practices, with a concurrent focus on equity. Such an approach would include embedding collaborative systems and practices in schoolwide/Tier 1 systems and practices (Garbacz, 2019; Stormshak et al., 2005). Research indicates three primary avenues that orient schools toward schoolwide family-school collaboration: (a) proactive, positive, and two-way communication with families; (b) school-family collaboration in school decisions; and (c) culturally responsive family-school social-emotional supports (Ishimaru, 2014; McIntosh et al., 2020; Moore et al., 2016; Sheridan et al., 2019).

Proactive, Positive, and Two-Way Communication

Communication is pivotal to promote family-school collaboration in the context of a school's TA practices. A family's decision about whether to engage with a school team is likely to hinge upon their perceptions about the school, history of interactions with school personnel, and their trust in the school. Research findings suggest that when schools and families have interacted positively and when school personnel have kept agreements with families over time, parents/caregivers will be more likely to engage with the school in the TA process (Santiago et al., 2016). If school personnel have sought out family input about student behavior in the past, they have family data that can be used to invite and engage families in the TA process in a manner that sensitively describes parent/caregiver and school personnel shared ideas about student strengths and areas of need (Moore et al., 2016).

Family-School Collaboration

Family-school collaboration can inform how and in what ways families are invited to and involved in the school TA process. When family voice is integrated in school policies and practices, school personnel and families can work together to sensitively reach out to a target family in a manner that respects family experiences and interests (Ishimaru, 2014). In addition, when families and schools collaborate, school personnel may be better equipped to identify community liaisons and community organizations that may be effective partners in reaching out to families and students, particularly when a family does not trust the school. Families can also help inform areas in which school personnel can build their capacity to effectively collaborate with families. These family-school interactions can inform how the TA is conducted and adaptions that are necessary at the school level to maximize and sustain family-school collaboration.

Culturally Responsive Family-School Support for Behavior

School emphasis on reducing inequalities and promoting equity is a foundational component of family-school collaboration (Ishimaru & Galloway, 2014; Powell & Coles, 2020). Research suggests that a family's and a student's interactions with the school when a TA is initiated is likely not the first discipline-oriented interaction. In fact, it is more likely that the family has experienced several interactions with educators about discipline, since elementary school or preschool (Powell & Coles, 2020). The ecological orientation to consultation advanced herein is well aligned with a social justice orientation to school practice (Williams & Greenleaf, 2012), which emphasizes the need to consider and include the student's family when planning and implementing supports within a consultation framework (Miranda & Radliff, 2016).

Including families in the TA process has implications for schoolwide systems. School teams' commitment to equitable discipline incudes collecting and examining disaggregated discipline data that depicts discipline for subgroups that are proportional to the student body (McIntosh et al., 2018). In addition, this commitment includes interrogating district and school discipline practices with different stakeholders, such as families, particularly families who have experienced disproportionate discipline (Sander & Bibbs, 2020). Reviewing discipline data and interrogating discipline practices should lead to actionable policy changes that can have direct implications for how the TA is conducted and how families experience the TA process.

Research Needs to Advance Family-Centeredness in School Threat Assessment

Several future research directions can be considered to advance a family-centered approach to support and intervention. The case study presented in this paper demonstrates how the FCU can be adapted within a TA, yet this work is in its initial stages, with initial development underway and a case study that shows how the adapted FCU may be implemented.

Continued work is necessary to integrate a participatory approach towards further intervention development and refinement.

Participatory research is needed to (a) better understand family perspectives and experiences and (b) include families in the intervention development and adaptation process. Too often research findings use educator-report to describe family experiences (see Garbacz et al., 2018 but *cf.* Strickland-Cohen & Kyzar, 2019). More participatory research is needed in the area of school approaches to support student behavior and school discipline. In addition, family voice has often not been included in the development of family-school interventions. The creation of multi-stakeholder advisory panels and inclusion of families as collaborators in the research process can help guide decision making about intervention development and adaptation that may increase the relevance, fit, and effectiveness of an intervention (Castillo, 2020; Spiel et al., 2018). Once interventions are developed, the use of hybrid study designs support integrating stakeholder voice and a close study of implementation within an outcome evaluation to understand what interventions, how they work, and for whom they may be most effective (Curran et al., 2012).

The family-centered support assessment and intervention process advanced herein has the potential to redefine family involvement in a school TA. However, additional research that integrates participatory approaches and follows a scoped and sequenced process with embedded credibility checks to ensure family voice and experiences are properly incorporated is needed. This research can include collaborating with families to (a) conduct a needs assessment; (b) adapt an intervention; (c) pilot test an intervention to make adaptations that are informed by examining implementation, stakeholder experiences, and outcomes; and (d) evaluate intervention efficacy for eventual dissemination (Dick & Carey, 1996).

Summary

School violence continues to be a pressing public health concern. By excluding the family in assessments of school threats of violence, schools may be missing opportunities to improve outcomes for students and to reduce risk. The efficacy of the FCU model has been supported in five large-scale randomized trials that span early childhood (Dishion et al., 2008), early elementary school (Garbacz et al., 2020), and early adolescence in middle school (Stormshak et al., 2011). Through this line of research, the FCU has shown that it is flexible and adaptable. Building on this research, we adapted the FCU to be implemented within a TA as a family-centered and supportive approach to promote engagement, positive family-school connections, and support student positive behavior. This approach addresses contextual factors associated with school threats of violence. We presented a case study to demonstrate how the FCU can be implemented within a TA, called the *Family-Centered Support Assessment and Intervention*. Future directions for practice and research point to possibilities for enhancing and expanding family-centeredness as a primary avenue to reduce risk, increase safety, and improve social-emotional outcomes for students.

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Table 1

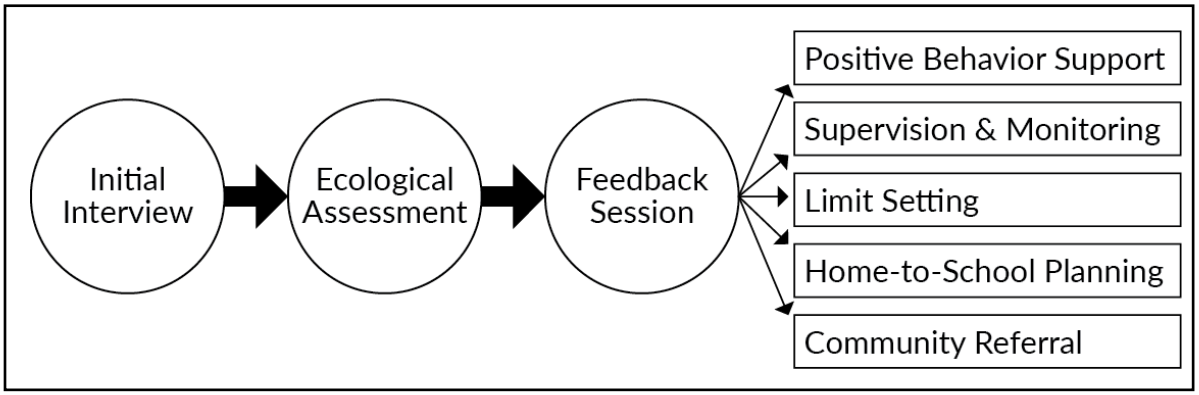
Family-Centered Support Assessment and Intervention

Stage 1	Stage 2	Stage 3	Stage 4

• FCU Initial Interview
• School personnel interviews
• Student interview
• Precautions to protect intended victims
• Evaluate school team attitudes about family
	• FCU Ecological Assessment
	  ○ Questionnaires, family interactions
	  ○ Assess family management, sociocultural context, child behavior and emotional adjustment
	• Safety evaluation
	• Continued school personnel interviews
	• Examine school discipline data
	• Examine school family support systems
		• FCU Feedback Session
		• Implement safety plan
		• Develop support plans
		  ○ Promote positive behavior, skill building, monitoring, limit setting
		  ○ Promote positive peer relationships
		• Partnership-centered session with family and school team
		  ○ Coordinate support across home and school
		  ○ Create two-way communication systems with family and school
			• Follow-up sessions and referrals
			• Maintain contact with student and family
			• Partnership-centered session with family and school team
			  ○ Continued progress monitoring

Figure 1

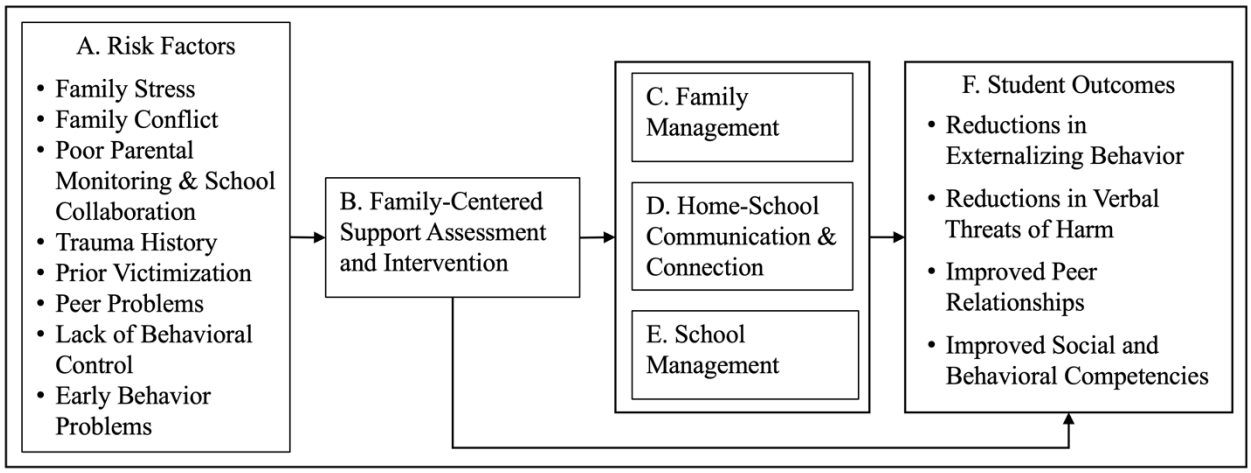
Overview of the Family Check-Up



Note. This figure depicts an overview of the Family Check-Up inclusive of the initial interview, ecological assessment, feedback sessions, and follow-up sessions.

Figure 2

Depiction of a Family-Centered Support Assessment and Intervention Process



Note. This figure shows contextual risk factors (Box A) that a family-centered support and intervention process can mitigate with proximal impacts on family management (Box C), home-school communication and connection (Box D), and school management and support (Box E), as well as distal impacts on student outcomes (Box F).