

Evaluation

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Evaluation may address a variety of different purposes (Ainsworth, 1998):

Improve program design

- analyses the way the program operates
- identifies difficulties and avoid them
- reviews new components to a program

Improve program implementation

- determines if the program has been implemented according to the original design
- decides if a program has a positive impact the service delivery and outcomes?

Evaluate outcome/impact

- determines whether the program has met its goals and had a positive affect on the group participants
- demonstrates a program's accountability in relation to it's performance and to obtain or maintain funding

Determine program effectiveness

- determines if a program is relevant or appropriate for all or some service users and locations
- confirms the program's long term effectiveness

A useful approach is to use the four levels of feedback and increase the quality of program evaluation.

Four levels of evaluation – (Kirkpatrick, 1975)

	Evaluation hierarchy	Type of questions
1	Reaction: program participants' estimates of satisfaction provide, an immediate level of evaluation (Foley, 1995)	Did the participants learn anything?
2	Learning: the extent of learning (i.e. skills acquisition, attitude change) that has been achieved is also of interest (Foley, 1995)	Did the participants retain what they learnt? (Thinking – Outcome focused)
3	Behaviour: extent to which learning has generalized to the family situation, or the application of skills is assessed at this level through follow-up after a program is completed	Did the participants put into practice what they learnt? (Action – Outcome focused)

4	Results: the wider impact of a program on a family or community is assessed	Did the learning affect the quality of the participant's life (Feeling – Outcome focused)
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The value of the evaluation will be increased if an external evaluator is employed. However if an external evaluation is not possible, the next best step is to develop an internal evaluation approach that reviews practice.

Level One: Did the participants learn anything? (Immediate)

This is the most basic level of evaluation. It is most easily gauged by asking the participants to complete a questionnaire at the end of the program.

Example:

The Workshop for Fathers who have a Child with a Disability identified the new learning at the end of the workshop with the following participant comments:

- I'm not alone with some problems and stress; other people also have the same problems
- Ways to improve my relationships
- Recognise the problems faced by other fathers
- Recognise the differences and similarities between disabilities
- Importance of spending time on improving family relationships
- Sharing responsibility with my wife
- There is support available if I need it
- Having a disabled child can affect your relationship with your partner
- The need to be more involved in day-to-day issues
- Spend more time with my wife
- Give all children equal time.

Other useful ways of gaining Level One information is to ask the participants to tick a set of statements that they agree with regarding the group program. Alternatively the leader could ask them to circle a series of words that are descriptions of the learning group experience for them.

Level Two, Three and Four Questions

Level Two Questions: Did the participants retain what they learnt? (Thinking)

Level Three Questions: Did the participants put into practice what they learnt? (Action)

Level Four Questions: Did the learning effect the quality of the participant's life (Feeling)

Level Two, Three and Four Questions are part of a follow-up evaluation that occurs after a certain period of time has elapsed post group. This period of time could be 3 months for short group programs or 6-12 months for longer group programs.

The follow-up evaluation determines what information or skills have been retained after the group is completed. These questions may ask the participants to name key ideas from the group or use a rating scale to measure the importance to them of a set of key ideas or skills.

The Level Three questions explore how the participants put these ideas into action after the end of the group. Questions could be asked about current actions, or someone else who knows the participant well might rate a list of participant's actions or responses.

The Level Four Questions explore if these ideas and actions actually had an effect on the quality of the participant's life or on other family members. If the quality of relationships has improved, the program has been very successful.

Results based accountability

Mark Friedman (2001) suggests using program performance measures that focus on effort required to deliver the program and the effect that the group had. This is captured in the key questions:

- How much did we do? (Quadrant 1)
- How well did we do it? (Quadrant 2)
- Is anyone better off? (Quadrant 3 and 4)

	<i>Quantity focus</i>	<i>Quality focus</i>
<i>Effort</i>	<i>1. How many groups did we deliver?</i>	<i>2. How well did we deliver it?</i>
<i>Effect</i>	<i>3. How much change/effect did the group produce?</i>	<i>4. What quality of change/effect did the group produce?</i>

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