Self-Affirmation and Parenting Programs
Using Self-Affirmation to Buffer Threat of Engagement in Parenting Programs
Michelle Spiegel, Zoelene Hill, Lisa Gennetian; Caroline Friedman Levy, consultant
New York University
For more information, browse our website: beELL.org or email us at beELL@nyu.edu

Background
• Stigma, fear, judgement, and reluctance to signal deficiency are psychological barriers that interfere with engagement in parenting programs (Koernting et al., 2013; Myton et al., 2014).
• Participation in parenting programs contributes to positive parenting practices, improved psychological well-being, and involvement with children’s education that extends into later years (Dawson-Moore et al., 2015; Marcon, 1999; Puma et al., 2012; Webster-Stratton, 1998).
• Self-affirmation of core values can reduce defensive reactions to threatening information and lead to a more expansive view of self (Cohen & Sherman, 2014; Yeager & Walton, 2011).
• Outcomes in domains as varied as education and health have shown favorable responsiveness to single-dose self-affirmations (Cohen & Sherman, 2014; Ehret & Sherman, 2014; Yeager & Walton, 2011).

Objectives
• To examine the feasibility of self-affirmation delivered via an online questionnaire platform to a general population of parents
• To examine the effect of self-affirmation in the context of engaging parents in a parenting program.

Contribution
• This is the first systematic examination of the use of self-affirmation designed to reduce psychological barriers that might interfere with parents’ expressed interest in receiving parent education information or interest in attending parenting programs.

Sample
• 290 U.S. mothers and fathers with at least one resident child under the age of 13 and household income ≥$35,000
• Relationship to child: 73% mothers; 22% fathers
• Number of children: 47% have one child; 29% have two; 15% have three; 7% have five or more
• Race: 11.5% self-identify as Black; 78% White; 5% Asian; 3.5% Native American; 2.5% other
• Ethnicity: 32% self-identify as Hispanic or Latino; 16% identify their child has Hispanic or Latino
• Education: 5% less than high school; 32% high school graduates; 16% have a 2-year degree; 31% some college; 13% 4-year degree; 3% have a professional degree
• Employment: 17% are not working; not looking for work; 35% are not working, looking for work; 36% work full-time; 12% work part-time
• Primary language: 78% do not speak a language other than English at home; 17% do; 5% sometimes speak a language other than English at home

Methods
• Eligible parents were recruited through PrimePanels. Individuals self-select into PrimePanels’ market research platform, complete a profile of characteristics, and are matched with relevant studies.
• Participants completed a 15 minute online survey that included demographic and socioeconomic questions including age, child birthdates, race/ethnicity, marital and work status.
• A random half of participants were administered a series of reflective self-affirmations consistent with previous self-affirmation exercises where respondents rank values in order of importance to them and then engage in four written responses.

Outcome Measures
• No impacts were found for the following examined subgroups: white vs. non-white, less than high schools vs. more than high school, working part-time or full-time vs. not working, mothers vs. fathers, respondent indicated that parents of children with developmental or behavioral challenges would benefit from a parenting program vs. did not indicate

Results
Participants in the treatment group who completed all of the self-affirmation exercises were more likely to express interest in parenting programs, among n=127 in the treatment group.

Treatment
In the following series, each sentence has an “I am” statement with a number. Please read each statement aloud and then decide which one is the most important to you. Please rank them in order of importance.

- Most important
- Less important

• Relationship with family
• For me, family is... important
• Helping my family...
• Being there for family...

- Most important
- Less important

• Work
• For me, work is...
• Helping my family...
• Being there for family...

- Most important
- Less important

• Education
• For me, education is...
• Helping my family...
• Being there for family...

- Most important
- Less important

• Health
• For me, health is...
• Helping my family...
• Being there for family...

- Most important
- Less important

• Financial security
• For me, financial security is...
• Helping my family...
• Being there for family...

- Most important
- Less important

• Personal values
• For me, personal values are...
• Helping my family...
• Being there for family...

- Most important
- Less important

• Devotional/spiritual values

- Most important
- Less important

• Psychological values

- Most important
- Less important

• Intellectual values

- Most important
- Less important

Next Steps
• While our study shows that delivering a single-dose self-affirmation to parents through an online survey platform is feasible, we plan to employ two different techniques to reduce differential attrition from the treatment group:
  • Employ a generic writing task for the control group so that the writing burden is similar across treatment and control participants.
  • Provide an extra financial incentive all written exercises.
• Most parents chose “relationships” as their most important value, which might carry over to the domain of parenting. Future work will present values that are external to the domain of focus.
• We will conduct further descriptive and experimental analyses for different subpopulations including by child age and birth order, parent work status, race/ethnicity, and perceptions of who benefits most from parenting programs.
• During the 2017-18 academic year, we aim to integrate self-affirmations to parents with children enrolled in NYC pre-Ks who are eligible to participate in a parenting program.

Acknowledgements
• We would like to acknowledge Geoff Cohen, Erin Godfrey, Karen Bierman, Jin Han Kim and Mackenzie Whippa for their feedback and guidance in executing this study.

Conclusions
• The majority of respondents chose “relationships, family and friends” as their most important value or quality.
• Delivering self-affirmations through an online survey format is feasible, though quality and consistency in completing all self-affirmation tasks vary, with some respondents deciding to drop out.
• Descriptively, parents who completed all of the self-affirmation reflection items expressed higher levels of interest in parenting programs than those who did not complete all of the items.
• Parents in the self-affirmation treatment group did not statistically differ in their expressed interest in parenting education or parenting programs.
• Parents expressed statistically higher interest in learning more about, and using, an app/website parenting resource than attending an in-person program.