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Discussant comments

Prepared for APPAM/MDRC Institutional Member Forum: The Future of Applying Behavioral Science to Improve Social Policy

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General reactions

• Growing body of exciting work in the domains of family and children

• Discovering BE solutions (diagnosis: BIAS, ideas42, nudge units); Designing BE interventions (BIP lab, Chicago Crime Lab, etc.); Enhancing existing programs and interventions via behavioral insights

• Deepening our understanding of (messy) actual family behavior and structuring environments as compared to predicting behavior agnostic to the environment.
  
  • Re-conceptualize domains like parenting and delivery of services such as child care subsidies

• Generating change in key/one decisions (nudges) and habits.

• Appealing low cost, and rapid fire, real-time learning and design. (Complement to collective of necessary larger evaluation and research efforts.)
Keeping the cart behind the horse

Evidence-building phase; Continue to invest in developing the *science* of behavioral science.

**Gap:** Testing underlying cognitive biases, perhaps in some academic circles? How to bridge knowledge and theory-building across sectors?
Use BE as method of inquiry: *Convert assumptions into questions*

- Re-training of conventional disciplinary training, and best practices. What outcome, when, in what context, and with whom
  - Not just new tools in an old tool box but questioning whether the screw driver was the right tool in the first place, or even if it is, whether we continue to call it a screw driver
- Asking the right question and matching the right solution to the problem. Why is a BE intervention not working?
  - Implementation assumption gone awry (e.g. reading a text)
  - Too many other structural or psycho-social barriers to overcome
  - Targeting the incorrect cognitive bias, or not the overwhelming one
Deeper incorporation of the context of poverty

• Time, money, and mental bandwidth are limited resources.

• Are we asking parents to spend more time on the right things, and less time on other things?
Not losing sight of higher-order principles

Critiques of libertarian paternalism (Riccardo Rebonato)

“Interventions motivated by and seek to exploit cognitive deficiencies in order to obtain outcomes deemed to be ultimately preferred by the nudged person.”

➢ Why is it a good idea to interfere with the {DOMAIN of CHOICE} decision of a typical, mentally healthy, and well informed citizen?

• *Who* determines personal and social welfare (who is the social planner)?

• Easier to exploit than eradicate biases

Simple, Non coercive, Cheap, Easy to reverse, Very effective
Harnessing insights from the behavioral sciences to build positive parenting habits and optimize the impact of existing early childhood interventions.

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Mapping GRS In Practice

HOME

Workshop Series 1

Orientation (In-person)

Letter & feedback form

Feedback

Workshop Series 2

GRS Party

Letter & feedback form

Feedback

Units 1-3

Letter & feedback form

Feedback

Units 4-6

Letter & feedback form

Feedback

Play. Share. Learn.

Teacher

Coach

Teacher

Coach

CLASSROOM
**Intervention: Letter + Goal Chart**

**Calendar**
- Reinforces expectation of daily completion vs. “one and done” attitude fostered by old checkboxes.
- Broken down into three 10 minute chunks to cue 30+ minutes total.

**Icons and Stickers**
- Reduce literacy demands;
- Invite children’s direct participation.

**Activity Chart**
- Getting Ready for School
- This Week
- Breakdown of activities into 30+ minutes total.
beELL-GRS activity chart improved routine processes

Nearly doubled return rate of weekly parent-teacher feedback

Weekly return rate of feedback, activity charts vs. conventional info-based feedback letter

- Overall BE student return %
- Non-BE student return %
Timing and desensitization: BE–technology intersection

beELL-NYC: SMS views to online content among control group mothers of infants who had not been previously receiving texts

![Bar chart showing the number of clicks through SMS messages from 6-Oct to 1-Dec. The chart indicates a peak on 6-Oct with a decline in the following days.](image-url)