

# beELL: nudging children to a better start

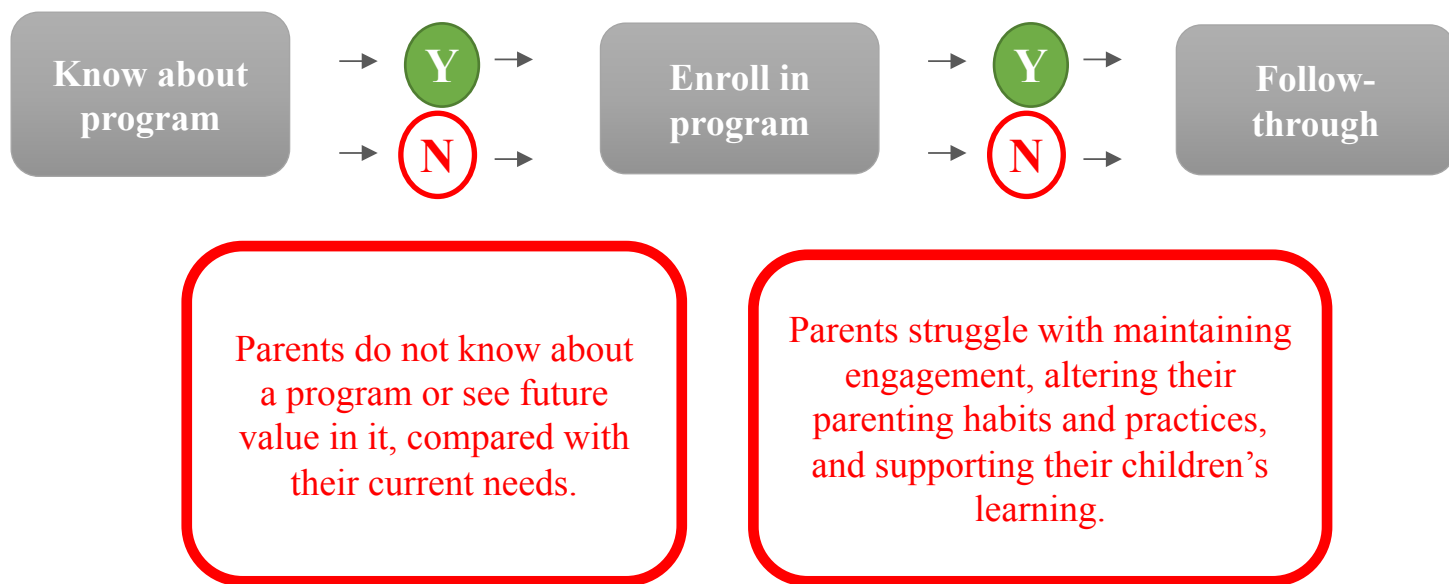
## What is beELL?

beELL harnesses insights from behavioral economics to build positive parenting habits and optimize the impact of early childhood interventions. This unique research lab is devoted to generating knowledge about how behavioral insights can inform parent behavior and transform the design of early childhood programs.

## How can behavioral insights influence parent engagement?

Parents juggle time, money, and their available mental resources, and they do so with the best intentions for their children's development. Circumstances of poverty can drain these resources, redirect parents' attention to material needs, and interfere with their intentions to engage responsively with their children and take advantage of early childhood education, curricula, and services. Behavioral economics widens the scope of understanding, viewing parents as not only "rational actors," as conventional economics might predict, but also as social creatures, subject to stigma and judgment and, like all individuals, facing demands that can strain and drain mental resources. Behavioral economics offers a framework for understanding how parents act in the real world and how context influences their behavior. These behavioral insights provide an avenue to design strategies to support parents in low-cost, scalable ways.

## A behavioral economic lens on parent decisions



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Find us on Twitter [@beELLog](https://twitter.com/beELLog)

## Behavioral Insight

## Behavioral Tool

Like all people, parents have many things to juggle and remember.

Send reminders via text message the day before or day of an event.

Judgment and stigma decrease self-efficacy.

Offer positive affirmation to encourage participation in a program.

What other people are doing matters.

Let parents know who else is participating and their thoughts on the program.

Immediate needs feel more pressing than future benefits of participation.

Provide micro incentives to reward parents in the present.

Scarce financial resources put pressure on self-control.

Have parents set concrete, situation-specific goals.

Parents misestimate the amount of time they spend on learning activities with children.

Provide parents with visual feedback showing time spent with children.

People behave in ways that are consistent with a salient aspect of their identity.

Prime parents' identity with the use of buttons or images.

**beELL applied behavioral insights by infusing them into these early childhood programs:**

- a text-message-based language and literacy intervention integrated with newborn home visiting
- a 14-week parent support program embedded into preschools
- a play-based preschool curriculum that fosters home–school connections
- a multi-week video-animated curriculum on infant and toddler language communication

**Challenge:** Low enrollment in an early language and literacy intervention program delivered via text message.

**Behavioral tool:** Make automatic enrollment the default option.

**Finding:** In the experimental group (default enrollment), 4.5% opted out. In the control group, 1.3% opted in.

**Challenge:** Low follow-through from sign-up to attendance at first weekly session of parenting program.

**Behavioral tool:** Replace sign-up sheet with an active-choice invitation (“Yes, I will attend to support my child’s development” or “No, I will find other ways to support my child’s development”).

**Finding:** In progress; shown effective in domains other than early childhood.

**Challenge:** Parenting programs are perceived as threatening to one’s sense of self.

**Behavioral tool:** Before asking parents to participate, have them write a simple positive affirmation, reflecting on a time they felt successful or proud.

**Finding:** Parents felt better about themselves and were more likely to express interest in attending or learning more about a parenting program.

**Challenge:** Attendance at weekly parenting program is inconsistent.

**Behavioral tool:** Ask parents every week to RSVP via text message.

**Finding:** Parents who cannot attend are more likely to respond than those who possibly will attend.

**Challenge:** Parents incorrectly estimate the amount of time they spend with their children on learning activities.

**Behavioral tool:** Provide visual feedback to parents, showing their self-reported time spent on activities.

**Finding:** Parents recalibrate and increase their time on play-based activities.