



Best Practices

How Community Professionals Use an Extension Age-Paced Parenting Newsletter Resource: A Descriptive Study

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Abstract

This preliminary study examined how 44 family-serving professionals utilize an Extension-based, age-paced parenting newsletter designed to extend evidence-based family education through print and digital formats. A cross-sectional survey assessed resource awareness, engagement, dissemination, and perceived value. Respondents most often shared printed newsletters (65.9%), website links (45.5%), and subscription information (43.2%). Among those answering the comparative-usefulness item, 55% rated the newsletters as much more useful than other parenting or child development resources. Findings support flexible, multimodal dissemination and identify opportunities to expand inclusive and specialized content.

Introduction

The expansion of digital resources has increased access to online parenting information, but parenting educators and family support professionals continue to play an important role in translating child development research into practical guidance for families. Extension has long supported this effort by providing evidence-based family education resources (Franz & Townson, 2008). As Extension responds to staffing limitations, funding constraints, and growing community needs, scalable approaches such as digital parenting newsletters can complement home visiting and in-person parenting education (Burton et al., 2021; Harder et al., 2017).

Age-paced parenting newsletters offer one approach to disseminating parenting information. These newsletters provide information aligned with a child's age and developmental stage and have been used in Extension and community education for

several decades. Age-paced parenting newsletters have also been adopted through statewide and county-based Extension systems, demonstrating their adaptability across local and statewide family education networks. For example, University of Wisconsin-Madison Division of Extension disseminates age-paced parenting newsletters statewide through its Parenting and Family Relationships program and county Extension offices, offering materials in English, Spanish, and Hmong. Prior studies found that parents viewed age-paced newsletters as relevant, easy to use, and helpful in supporting positive parenting practices, particularly among first-time parents (Brotherson et al., 2012; Ostergren & Riley, 2012; Panza et al., 2020; Riley et al., 1991). Parents have reported sharing newsletter information with relatives and friends, thereby extending the reach of the materials beyond the original recipient (El Sherif et al., 2023; Walker & Riley, 2001). Although early age-paced newsletters were primarily distributed in print, more recent programs have incorporated email, websites, and printable digital formats to increase accessibility and geographic reach (Loignon et al., 2022; Pluye et al., 2025; Vilches et al., 2020).

Parents and professionals increasingly use both digital and relational sources of parenting information, with online materials often supplementing rather than replacing guidance from trusted practitioners (Dworkin et al., 2013; El Sherif et al., 2023; Plantin & Daneback, 2009; Radey & Randolph, 2009). Implementation research suggests that professionals are more likely to use educational resources when they view them as relevant, practical, and compatible with their work responsibilities and service environments (Aarons et al., 2011; Durlak & DuPre, 2008; Rogers,

2003). Family-serving professionals including Extension educators, home visitors, early childhood educators, and family support specialists may serve as important intermediaries who select, adapt, and share parenting information according to families' needs and access preferences.

The resource examined in this study is the result of a multistate, Extension-based collaboration which has distributed evidence-based, age-paced parenting newsletters electronically and in printable formats since 2008. Process-monitoring evaluations have demonstrated sustained engagement and broad geographic reach (Kim et al., 2025; Vilches et al., 2020), suggesting its potential as a scalable resource for family education. However, despite evidence supporting age-paced newsletters and their increasing digital availability, limited research has examined how community-based educators discover, use, and disseminate digital resources across practice settings. Even less is known about professionals' engagement patterns, perceptions of usefulness, preferred dissemination methods, and recommendations for improvement. Understanding these perspectives can inform the development and implementation of parenting resources that better support both family-serving professionals and the families they serve.

Objective

The purpose of this preliminary study was to examine how community professionals serving families engage with an Extension-based, age-paced parenting newsletter resource. Specifically, the study aimed to describe how respondents learned about and accessed the resource, how they shared it with families, how they evaluated the digital newsletters'

usefulness relative to other parenting resources, and what improvements they might recommend.

Method

A cross-sectional descriptive design was selected because the study sought to document current patterns of awareness, engagement, dissemination, and perceived usefulness among existing community-based professional users rather than evaluate an intervention or establish causal relationships. Data was collected on a rolling basis from 2021 through 2024 as part of ongoing program evaluation conducted every year with subscribers. The same survey instrument remained available through the newsletter website throughout the collection period. Periodic email invitations or reminders were distributed to newsletter subscribers, including community-based professional users. Responses were combined across years because the survey items and administration procedures remained consistent throughout the collection period.

Participants and Recruitment

Eligible respondents were adults working in professional roles serving children and families who had used the age-paced newsletter resource. The anonymous survey link was posted on the program website and distributed through subscriber communications. Participation was voluntary, and no incentives were offered. Eligibility was based on respondents' self-reported use of the newsletter resource in their professional work. Because recruitment occurred through the website and subscriber communications, the study used a convenience sample of existing and prospective users.

Survey Instrument

The research team developed a survey for

program-evaluation purposes based on the study objectives and the information needed to describe professional engagement with the newsletter resource. Items were organized into five areas: (a) professional and demographic characteristics, (b) populations and numbers of families served, (c) awareness of and engagement with the resource, (d) methods used to share newsletter materials, and (e) perceived usefulness, strengths, and recommendations. Closed-ended items used single-response categorical options, multiple-response checklists, and ordered response categories. Open-ended questions invited respondents to describe valued features, needed improvements, and desired additional resources. The survey was reviewed by members of the multistate program team for content relevance and clarity before distribution. Because the instrument was designed for descriptive program evaluation rather than as a multi-item psychometric scale, internal consistency and construct-validity statistics were not calculated.

Analysis

Survey responses were exported from Qualtrics and analyzed using IBM SPSS Statistics. Descriptive statistics (frequencies and percentages) were calculated for categorical variables. Percentages were based on valid responses for each item; therefore, percentages for multiple-response questions could exceed 100%.

Exploratory chi-square analyses were considered but were not appropriate because of the small sample size, multiple-response items, and sparse cell counts. Open-ended responses were analyzed using descriptive content analysis. One researcher developed initial content categories, which were reviewed

and refined with the research team through discussion.

The University of Nevada, Reno Institutional Review Board determined the study to be exempt because it involved anonymous surveys of adults and presented no more than minimal risk. The survey introduction described the study and informed consent procedures. Consent was implied through survey completion. No identifying information was collected, and findings are reported in aggregate.

Findings/Results

Participant Characteristics

A total of 44 family-serving professionals completed the survey. Respondents represented a diverse range of professional roles, including parenting and early childhood educators, higher education, nursing, speech-language therapy, management, and special education. Most worked with families of children from birth to 5 years of age and provided both direct and indirect services. Nearly half had more than 20 years of experience working with families. Additional respondent characteristics are presented in Table 1.

Awareness and Use of Online Age-Paced Parenting Newsletter

Respondents learned about this parenting newsletter resource through multiple sources (Table 2). The most frequently reported sources were community agencies or Cooperative Extension offices (36.4%) and internet searches (34.1%). Most respondents reported visiting the website monthly (51.2%), and the majority had subscribed to the newsletter for one to five years (61.0%), suggesting continued engagement with the resource.

Sharing Online Age-Paced Parenting Newsletter Resources with Families

Professionals reported multiple methods for sharing JITP newsletters with families. The most common approach was distributing printed newsletters (65.9%), followed by sharing website links (45.5%) and encouraging families to subscribe directly to JITP (43.2%). A smaller number of respondents described other sharing methods, such as using handouts during home visits or sending links via text messages. These findings suggest that JITP resources are used flexibly across both in-person and digital service delivery models, allowing professionals to tailor dissemination strategies to family needs and access.

Perceived Value and Usefulness of Online Age-Paced Parenting Newsletter

When asked to compare JITP online age-paced parenting newsletters to other parenting or child development resources they use, more than half of respondents rated JITP as “much more useful” (55.0%), while the remaining participants indicated it was “about the same” (45.0%). No respondents rated JITP as less useful than other resources.

Strengths

Open-ended responses indicated respondents valued the newsletters' age-specific content, concise format, broad developmental coverage, and availability in Spanish. Respondents also described the materials as practical, research-based, and easy to share with families (Table 3).

Suggested Improvements and Requests

Respondents recommended expanding the resource through additional language translations, materials for developmental disabilities, content for older youth, and supplemental formats such as videos and

worksheets. They also suggested increasing promotion of the resource and developing additional materials to support diverse family needs (Table 3).

Discussion

Findings show how professionals discover, use, and share online age-paced parenting newsletters to support family education. Overall, these newsletters function as flexible tools that integrate into both in-person and digital service delivery.

Professionals most frequently report learning about the resource through community agencies or Cooperative Extension Service offices, as well as through internet searches. These findings highlight the continued importance of professional networks and institutional channels in disseminating parenting education resources. Extension systems and community agencies often serve as important bridges between research-based parenting information and practitioners working directly with families (Franz & Townson 2008; Harder et al., 2017). At the same time, the substantial proportion of respondents who discovered the resource through online searches suggests that digital discoverability is also an important pathway for awareness and use. Together, these findings suggest that both professional networks and online search contribute to awareness of the resource, consistent with evidence that parents increasingly rely on trustworthy online sources for child-related information (Kubb & Foran, 2020).

Patterns of engagement with the newsletter resource suggest that professionals use it on an ongoing basis. Over half of respondents reported visiting the JITP website monthly and nearly one-fifth reported accessing it weekly. In

addition, most participants have subscribed to JITP for one to five years. These patterns suggest that professionals use the resource as an ongoing source of parenting information rather than a one-time reference. The age-paced format may encourage continued use as families progress through different developmental stages (Cudaback et al., 1985; Riley et al., 1991).

Professionals described multiple approaches to sharing newsletter materials with families, highlighting the adaptability of the resource across practice settings. The most common approach was distributing printed newsletters directly to families, although many professionals shared the website links and encouraged subscriptions, too. The continued reliance on printed newsletters, specifically for home visits, also remains relevant. At the same time, digital sharing methods may be used to reach families beyond scheduling meetings and support ongoing engagement with parenting information (Dworkin et al., 2013; Radey & Randolph, 2009). These findings also align with recent reviews indicating that parents increasingly seek parenting information through digital platforms and value accessible, evidence-based resources delivered in multiple formats (Martens et al., 2024).

Participants reported a strong perceived value of the newsletter resource compared to other parenting or child development resources. More than half rated JITP as “much more useful”; none rated it as less useful. Respondents valued the newsletters’ age-specific, concise, and bilingual format, along with their broad developmental content. These findings are consistent with prior research highlighting the effectiveness of

developmentally tailored parenting education materials (Brotherson et al., 2012).

Professionals suggested expanding content to reflect diverse family structures, additional languages, and resources for developmental delays or disabilities, along with materials for older youth and formats such as videos or worksheets. Overall, the findings suggest that family-serving professionals across a variety of roles find that age-paced parenting newsletters to be useful resources that bridge between research-based information and everyday professional practice, particularly when they are designed to be accessible, adaptable, and responsive to diverse family needs.

Several limitations should be considered. First, the study used a small convenience sample of professionals who were already users of the newsletter resource. This recruitment approach may have introduced self-selection bias and limits the generalizability of the findings to other family-serving professionals. Second, the data were self-reported, cross-sectional, and did not assess outcomes for parents or families. Finally, although exploratory inferential analyses were considered, the modest sample size, multiple-response survey items, and limited variability across several variables limited the feasibility of conducting meaningful chi-square analyses. Consequently, the findings should be interpreted as descriptive and exploratory.

In conclusion, this preliminary study provides new insight into how family-serving professionals use an Extension-based, age-paced parenting newsletter resource in practice. Respondents represented a diverse range of professional roles and reported using the

newsletters in both direct and indirect service delivery, demonstrating the flexibility of the resource across community settings. The findings suggest that evidence-based parenting newsletters can extend the reach of Extension education by supporting professionals with practical, accessible resources that can be shared in both print and digital formats.

Future research should examine how professionals integrate digital parenting resources into their practice, whether use differs across professional roles or service settings, and how Extension can increase awareness and adoption among new professionals. Additional studies should also evaluate how professionals' use of these resources influences parent engagement and family outcomes.

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Tables

Table 1. Participant Characteristics (N = 44)

Characteristics	Category	N (%)
Country	United States	42 (95.5)
	No response	2 (4.5)
States	Indiana	6 (14%)
	Minnesota	6 (14%)
	Wisconsin	4 (9%)
	Florida	4 (9%)
	Alabama	3 (7%)
	Illinois	3 (7%)
	Iowa	3 (7%)
	Nebraska	3 (7%)
	Massachusetts	2 (5%)
	New Mexico	2 (5%)
	Michigan	1 (2%)
	New Hampshire	1 (2%)
	Virginia	1 (2%)
	No response	5 (11%)
Age Group of Children Served	Ages 0-5	34 (77%)
	Ages 13-18	1 (2%)
	Other	7 (16%)
	No response	2 (5%)
Field of work (self-identified):	Child care/ ECE / EHS	4 (9%)
	Education	4 (9%)
	Extension	1 (2%)
	Family member	1 (2%)
	Family support specialist	4 (9%)
	Health / maternity	3 (7%)
	Higher education	1 (2%)
	Nutrition	1(2%)
	Parenting education	6 (14%)
	Special education	1 (2%)
	Speech therapy	1 (2%)
	Support services	1 (2%)
	Not named	4 (9%)

Table 1. Participant Characteristics (N = 44) Continued

Role (self-identified)	Educator/teacher	8 (18%)
	Family member	1 (2%)
	Family support specialist/worker	5 (11%)
	Field specialist	1 (2%)
	Home visitor	9 (21%)
	Manager/supervisor	4 (9%)
	Midwife/nurse	3 (7%)
	Parent educator	5 (11%)
	Speech Therapist	1 (2%)
Type of outreach / engagement	In-Person Service	35 (80%)
	Indirect Reach (email, website, mailing, or handouts)	38 (86%)
Reach-Weekly	1-10 families	16 (36%)
	11-20 families	13 (30%)
	More than 20 families	5 (11%)
	No response	10 (23%)
Reach - Monthly	Less than 50 families	26 (59%)
	51-100 families	10 (23%)
	101-250 families	0
	More than 251 families	2 (5%)
	No response	6 (14%)
Gender	Female	39 (89%)
	Male	1 (2%)
	No response	4 (9%)
Race/Ethnicity	White	32 (73%)
	Hispanic/Latino/Latina	3 (7%)
	Black/African American	3 (7%)
	Asian	1 (2%)
	Other	1 (2%)
Education	Some college/vocational training	4 (9%)
	College degree	28 (64%)
	No response	12 (27%)

Note. Percentages are based on the total sample unless otherwise indicated. Item-level missing responses varied. Race and ethnicity allowed multiple selections; therefore, percentages may exceed 100%.

Table 2. Awareness and Engagement with the Parenting Newsletter (N =44)

Variable	n	%
How respondents learned about the resource*		
Community agency/Extension	16	36.4
Internet search	15	34.1
Other	8	18.2
Link from another website	7	15.9
Friend/family	3	6.8
Website visits		
Daily	1	2.3
Weekly	8	18.2
Monthly	21	47.7
Few times/year	11	25.0
Length of subscription		
Less than one year	11	25.0
1–5 years	25	56.8
More than 5 years	5	11.4

*Multiple responses permitted. Percentages exceed 100%.

Table 3. Themes Identified from Open-Ended Responses

What Professionals Valued	Example comments
Age-specific information	"Age appropriate"; "specific to developmental stage"
Comprehensive topics	Child development, health, nutrition, behavior, safety
Easy to understand	Concise, easy to read, parent-friendly
Professional quality	Printable PDF, visually appealing
Bilingual resources	Spanish versions appreciated
Timely information	Delivered when developmentally relevant
Suggested Improvements	Example suggestions
More languages	Additional translations beyond Spanish
Diverse family structures	Greater inclusion of single-parent families
Special needs	Developmental delays, disabilities, autism
Older children	Resources for preteens and adolescents
Additional formats	Videos, worksheets, activities, trainings
More dissemination	Greater promotion of the resource

These themes were derived from qualitative review of the open-ended responses.