

Promoting Healthy Pregnancies and Births in Badger County: Evaluation of *Preparing to Parent* Newsletter Series

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What is *Preparing to Parent*?

- 4 Issue Set of Prenatal Newsletters
- Prequel to *Parenting the First Year* Newsletter Series
- Available for each trimester of pregnancy and the time around birth
- Information on topics like: Prenatal Care, Healthy Eating, Avoiding Alcohol and Tobacco, Pregnancy Changes, etc.

Preparing to Parent



PREPARING FOR CHILDBIRTH & AFTERWARDS



Ways to be a good parent

Talk with people about parenting. Other parents with young children, family members, and child care providers are excellent choices.

Link your child to great people, places, food, and health care.

Be good to yourself: Eat well, get enough rest, go for walks, and take time for yourself.

The little things you do — talking, singing, reading, laughing — are important.

Notice and respond to the wonderful things your child does. Enjoy!

Do your best every day, but remember that no parent is perfect. If you have a bad day, wake up the next morning ready to start again.

Love your baby!

Dad — Remember, this newsletter is for you, too! You are an important part of your baby's life, even now. By supporting your partner and planning to take an active role in your baby's life, you are doing your part!

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Why a *Preparing to Parent* Newsletter Series?

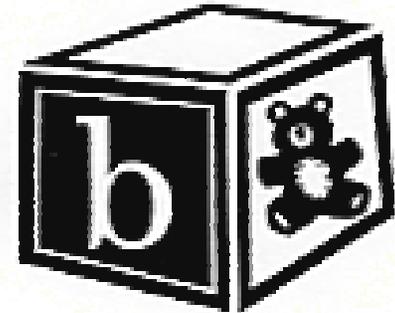
- Prenatal period is a critical time for the developing infant
- Lack of information can lead to unhealthy pregnancy behaviors
- Unhealthy behaviors put the expectant mom and unborn child at risk
- Prenatal Newsletters reinforce and supplement advice from health care providers
- Lack of knowledge about babies can lead to incompetent parenting

Advantages of Newsletters:

- Age-Paced to reach expectant parents at a “Teachable Moment”
- Reaches socially isolated families
- Can be shared with others
- Low cost
- Available in Spanish
- Easy to read and understand (Written at 5th Grade reading level)

Developed by University of Wisconsin- Extension for Three Goals:

- To help expectant parents have a healthy pregnancy and baby
- To promote competent parenting
- To prevent abusive parenting



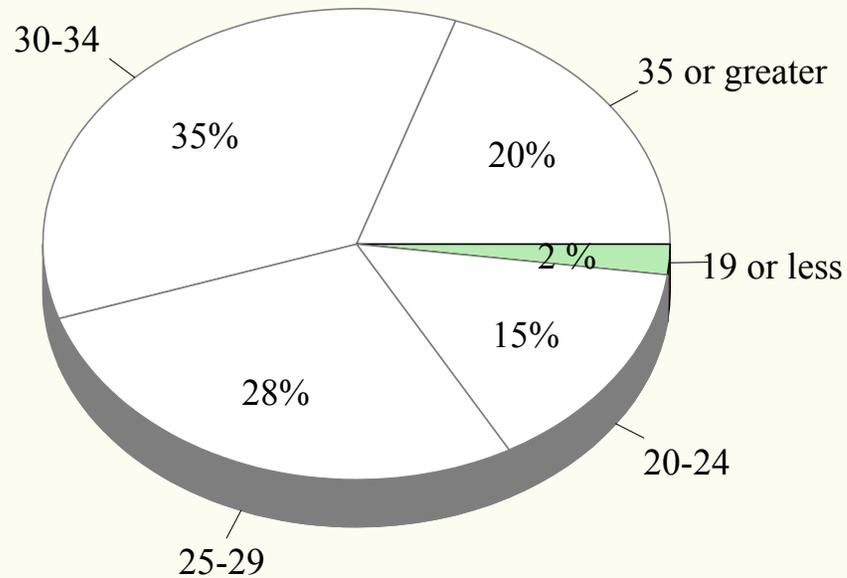
Are the Newsletters Effective?

The Evaluation Study:

- Sample Size: 112 families
- Response rate to questionnaire survey: 60%
- All respondents were mothers
- Only 5% were single parents
- Over one-third (38%) were first time parents

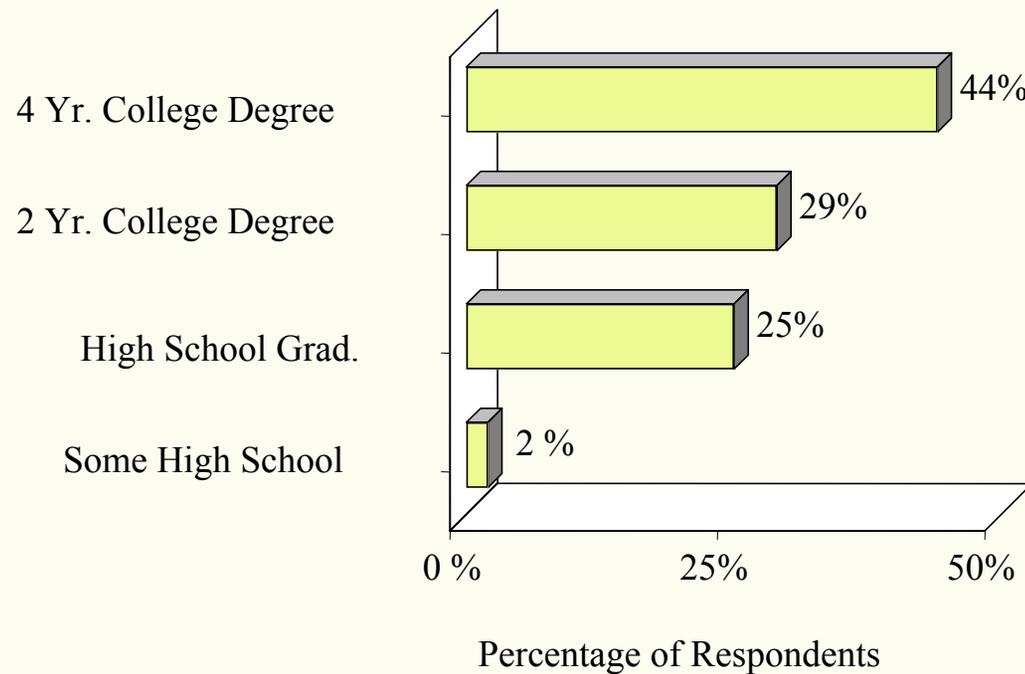
2% of Respondents Were Teenagers

Figure 1.
Age of Respondents



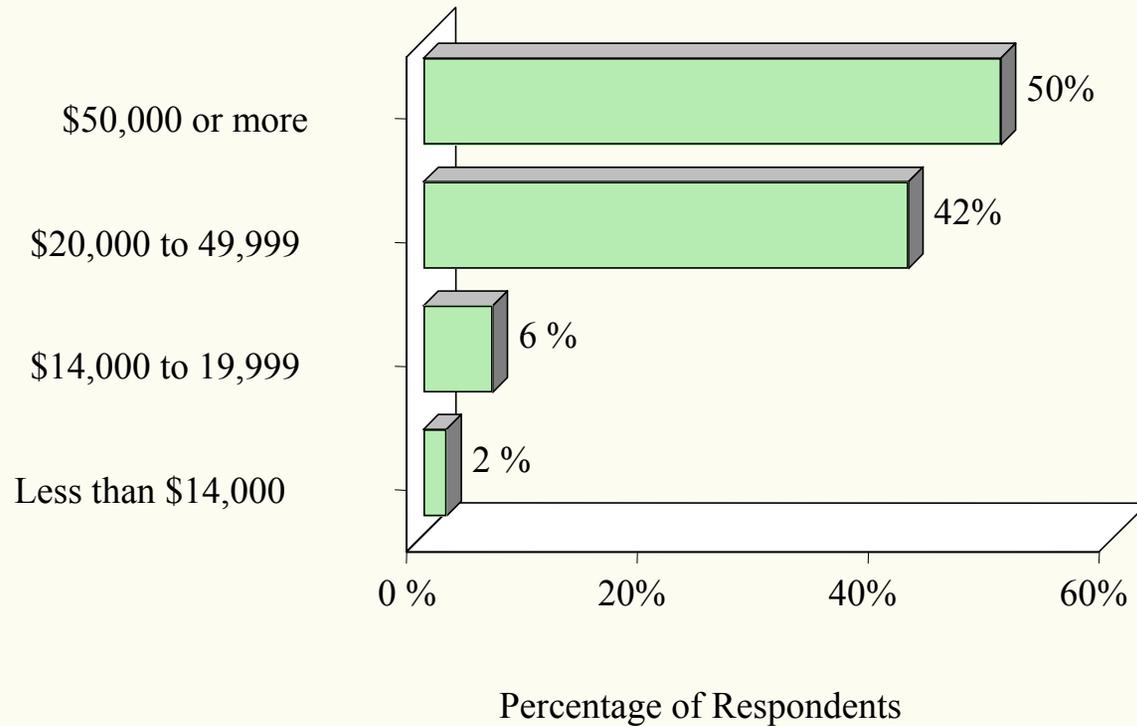
Less Than Half Had a 4-Year College Degree

Parents' Formal Education



About 8% Had Family Incomes in the Poverty Range

Family Incomes, 2006

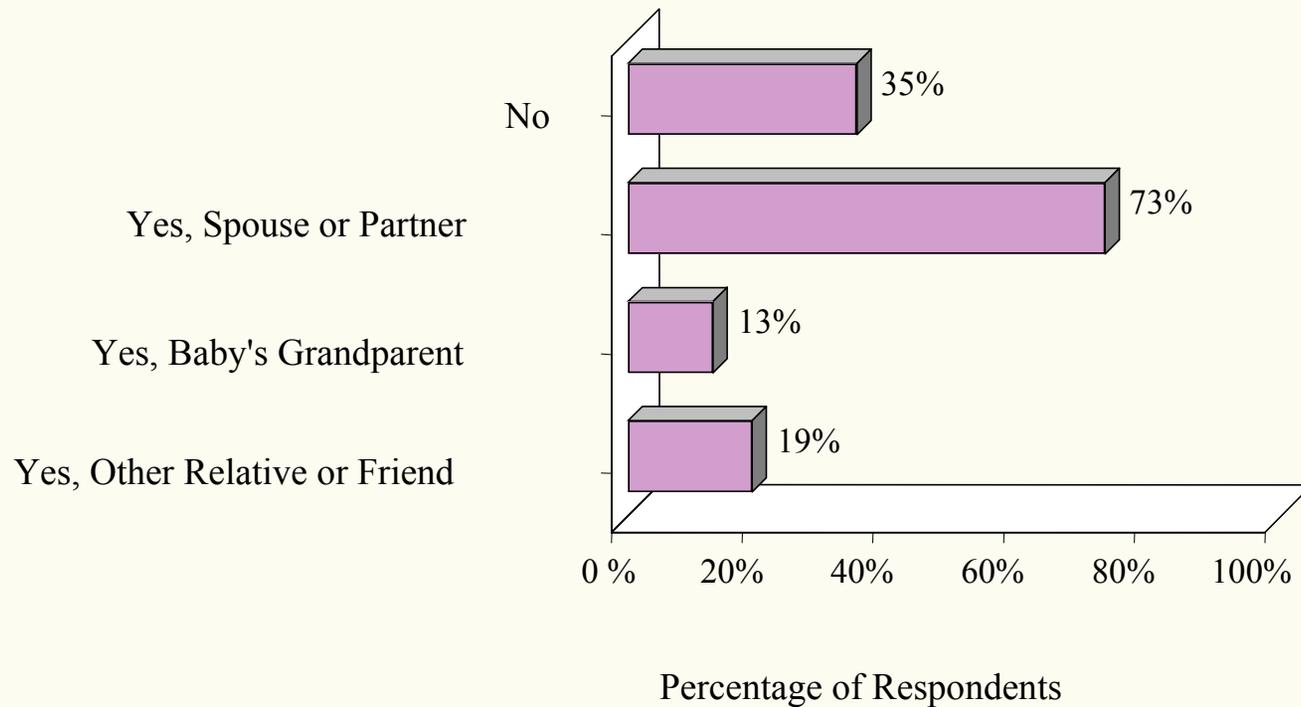


Did Parents Read the Newsletters? They Say “Yes!”

- 63% said they read all articles in all issues
- 50% save the newsletters as a reference

Readership Doubled By Sharing

"Does anyone else read your copy of the newsletters?"

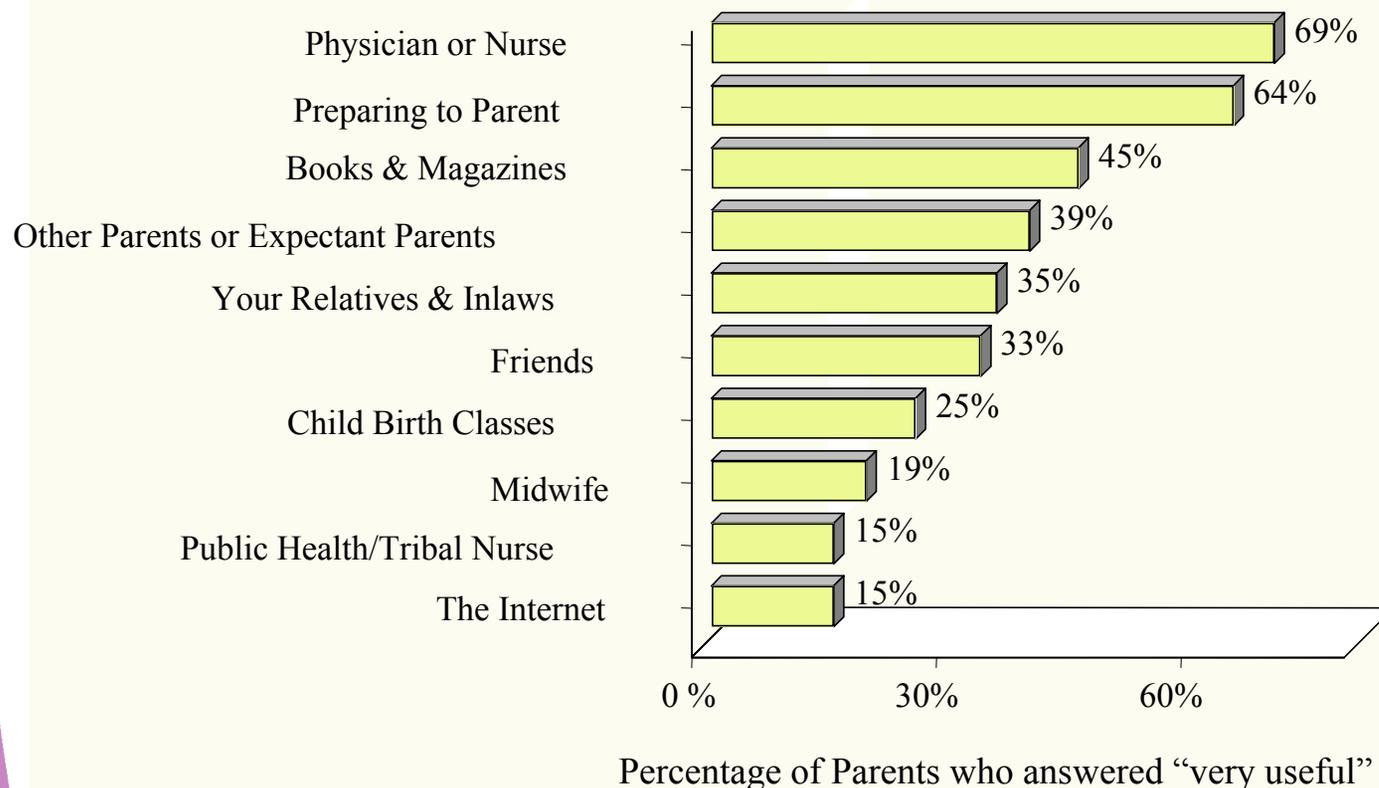


Examples of What Parents Said:

- “My baby’s grandmother read the newsletters during my pregnancy so she could learn how things have changed since she had her babies.”
- “I really like having the newsletter to read and share with my husband. He didn’t have time to read other information, but liked the short newsletter. Thanks!”

Parents Rate the Newsletters “Very Useful” for Advice More Often Than Other Sources, Except Doctors or Nurses

Usefulness of each Source of Parenting Information for Parents

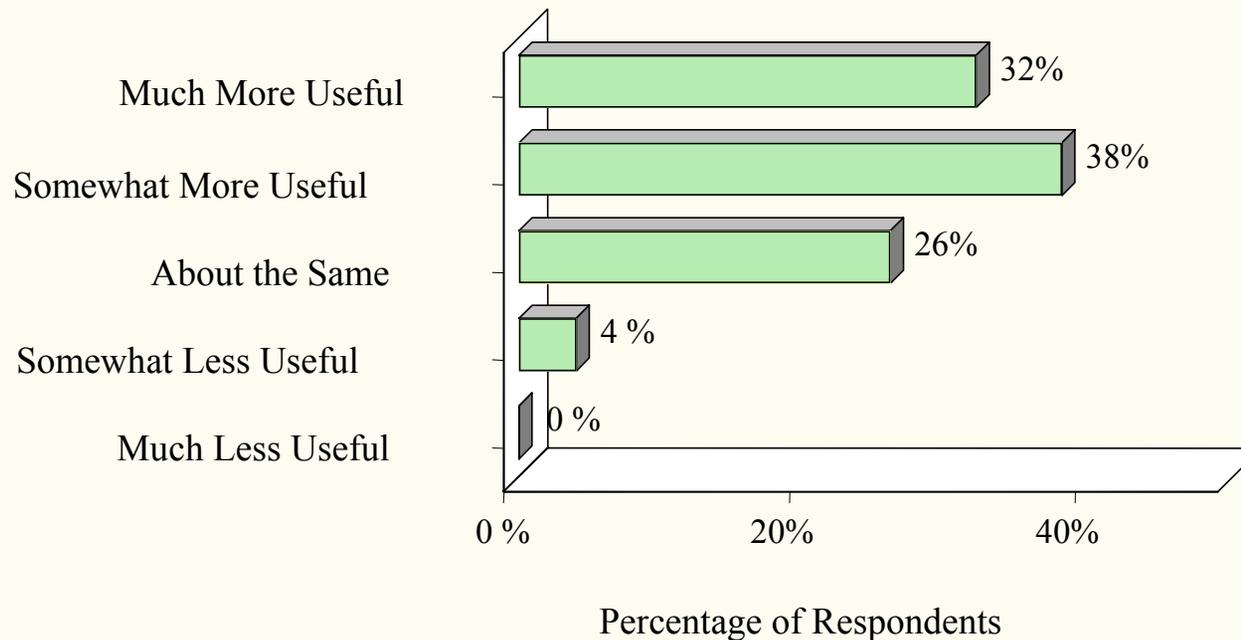


Parents Commented On Their Usefulness:

- “The newsletter is the best source of prenatal information that I have come across. It helped me realize that I can nurse my baby, even when I go back to work. Thank you for the wonderful newsletter.”
- “The newsletters really helped me understand the importance of seeing my doctor on a regular basis, even though I was feeling fine.”

70% of Parents Rated the Newsletters “Much More Useful” or “Somewhat More Useful” than Information Received from their Health Provider

"Compared to other information I received from my health clinic or hospital, the *Preparing to Parent* newsletters were..."



Parents Like the Age-Pacing of the Newsletters

- “It was very helpful to receive the newsletter when I was at that stage of my pregnancy. I liked the page showing what my baby’s development was like then and how I would be feeling.”
- “I liked that I got the newsletter from my doctor during each trimester. It helped me remember what my doctor said, so I wasn’t always calling and bothering her with questions.”

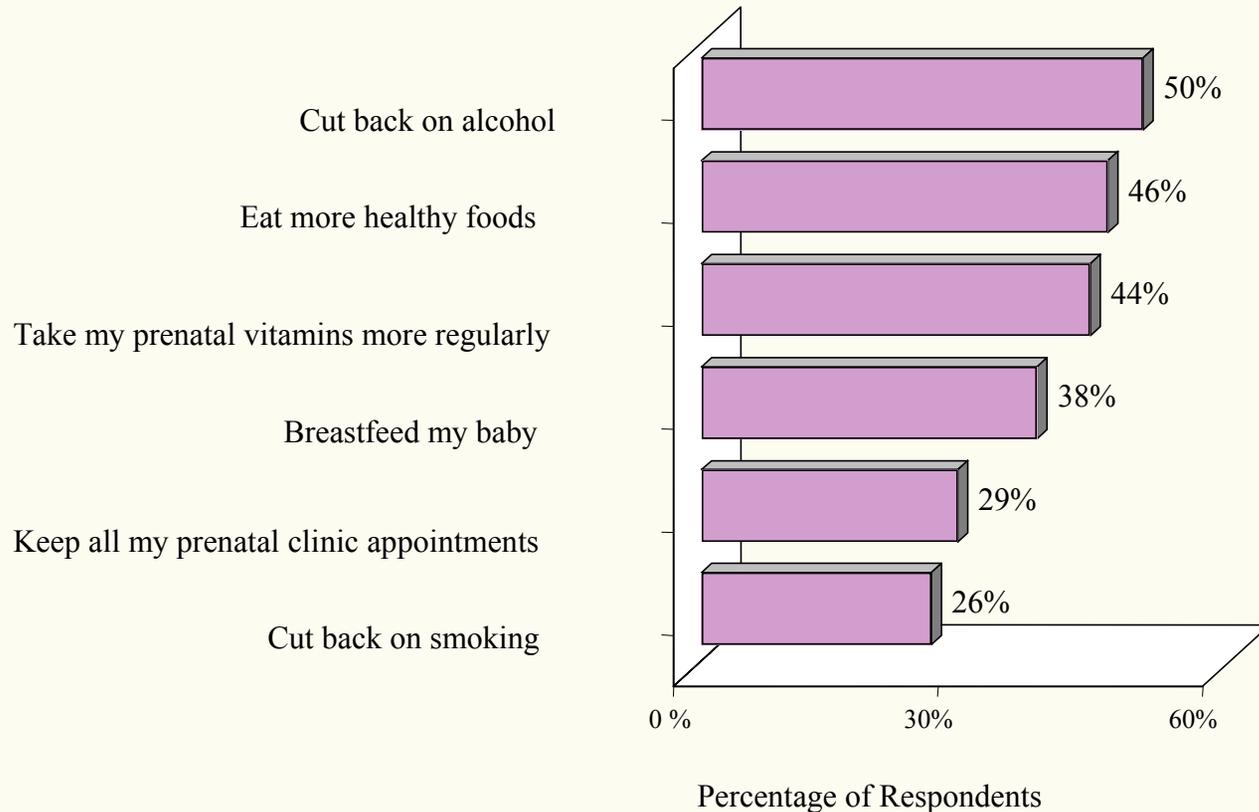
Parents Believe that Reading the Newsletters Improved Their Prenatal and Early Parenting Behaviors

- “I really liked all the nutritional information in the newsletters. It really helped me when planning what I could and should eat during my pregnancy.”
- “Reading the newsletters convinced me about the importance of breastfeeding. I didn’t know how good it was for both my baby and me.”

Parents Report Changing Child-Rearing Behaviors in 6 Key Areas

Self-Reported Behavior Change

"Reading the newsletters helped convince me to..."



50% Said That Reading the Newsletters Helped Convince Them to “Cut Back on Alcohol.”

- Prenatal alcohol use is one of the most preventable causes of birth defects and developmental problems.
- About 1 in 100 infants (in the U.S.) are born with symptoms of prenatal alcohol exposure.
- Children with Fetal Alcohol Syndrome exhibit many physical, behavioral and cognitive abnormalities.
- More than half of women of child bearing age drink alcohol.

Examples of What Parents Said:

- “I didn’t realize that even one drink could harm my baby. After reading that I quit altogether. It’s just not worth my baby’s health.”
- “After reading in the newsletters that drinking any alcohol can hurt my baby for life I decided not to drink while I was pregnant. I don’t think most of my friends realize this.”

The Newsletters Convinced 46% To “Eat More Healthy Foods” & 44% To “Take Their Prenatal Vitamins More Regularly”

- A healthy diet reduces the risk of low birth weight and small for gestational age infants.
- Folic acid prevents neural tube defects.
- Multivitamin supplements may reduce the risk of other birth defects.
- Pregnancy increases women’s need for certain nutrients, including Calcium, Vitamin D, Iron and Folic Acid.

Examples of What Parents Said:

- “It was so helpful knowing what foods I needed to avoid while I was pregnant. I didn’t know soft cheese could have bacteria that might make me sick and hurt my baby. Thanks for the valuable info!”
- “In the newsletters there was a chart showing how much of each kind of food I should eat during my pregnancy with examples of what a serving is. This was really useful in making healthy meal plans.”

38% Said the Newsletters Convinced Them “to Breastfeed Their Baby.”

- Breastfeeding provides many benefits to both nursing mothers and infants.
- For infants, breastfeeding reduces the risk of ear, gastrointestinal, respiratory, and other infections, and may reduce the risk of SIDS, Diabetes, Obesity, and Leukemia.
- For mothers, breastfeeding helps with Postpartum Recovery, and reduces the risk of breast and ovarian cancers, and Type 2 Diabetes.

Examples of What Parents Said:

- “I kind of knew that breastfeeding was good for baby, but I didn’t realize all the benefits for both me and my baby until I read about them in the newsletter. After that I decided to breastfeed for a whole year.”
- “I had already decided to breastfeed, but my husband wasn’t so sure. After we read the newsletter even he got on board with my decision. Thanks!”

29% Said the Newsletters Convinced Them to “Keep All Their Prenatal Appointments.”

- Adequate prenatal care reduces the risk for potentially avoidable pregnancy complications.
- Early and regular prenatal care provides necessary screening and treatment for medical conditions, such as Gestational Diabetes and Anemia.
- Prenatal care provides information about behaviors that impact maternal and infant well-being, such as smoking and drinking alcohol.

Examples of What Parents Said:

- “I didn’t realize how important it was to keep all my doctor appointments until I read the newsletter. After that I never missed one.”
- “I read in the newsletter that a back ache could be a sign of problems. I decided to call my doctor and it turned out I was having some contractions...He said if I hadn’t come in when I did, the baby might have come too early. Thank you!”

26% Said the Newsletters Convinced Them to “Cut Back on Smoking.”

- Smoking during pregnancy is the single most preventable cause of illness and death among mothers and infants.
- Maternal prenatal smoking is related to low birth weight and premature births.
- Prenatal smoke exposure is related to Hyperactivity Disorder and behavior problems, and also affects a child’s language and cognitive development.

Examples of What Parents Said:

- “I’ve smoked for so long that quitting seemed impossible. But I did cut way down on the number of cigarettes I smoked each day. Now that my baby’s here I try to only smoke outside.”
- “Reading about all the negative things that could happen to my baby was the final thing that made me want to quit. I started working with my doctor to cut down gradually, and stopped smoking completely by my third trimester.”

Which Parents Need Prenatal and Parenting Information Most?

- First time parents
- Parents who experience one or more socio-economic stressors
 - Low income
 - Low education
 - Single parents
 - Socially isolated

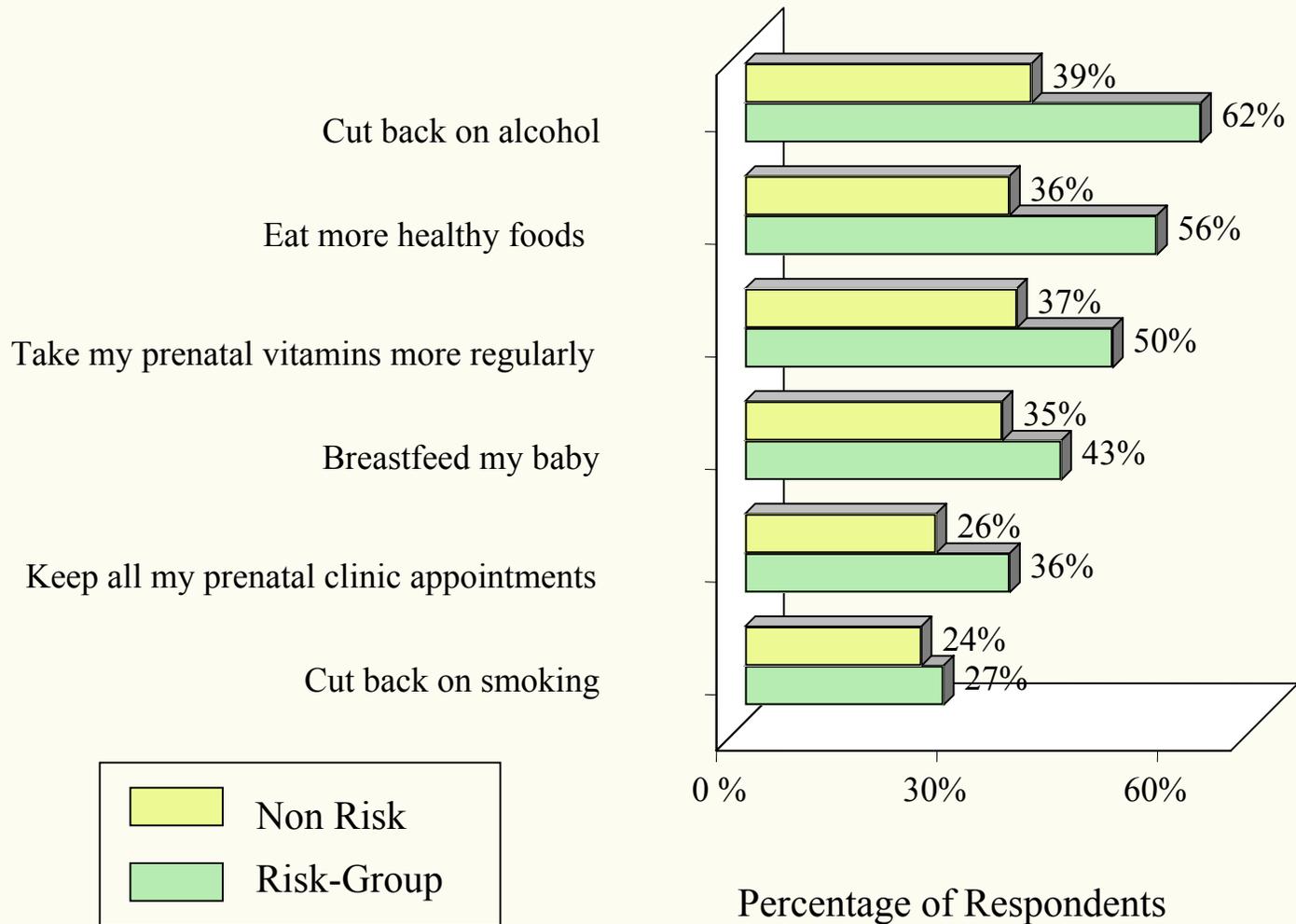
Risk Group Parents Reported Greater Change in Prenatal Behaviors Than Non-Risk Parents.

In particular, risk-group parents were significantly more likely to:

- **Cut Back on Alcohol**, and to
- **Eat More Healthy Foods**

compared to non-risk parents ($p < .05$).

“Reading the newsletters convinced me to...



Use of Lie Scale Items to Check for Biases

**Parents Were Asked About Something That
Might Have Been in the Newsletter But
Wasn't:**

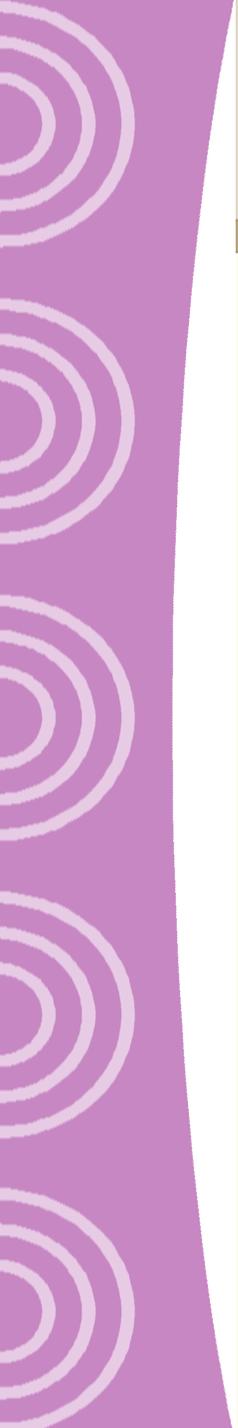
“Reading the newsletters helped me...

...avoid getting stretch marks on my stomach.”

...decide what kind of diapers to use.”

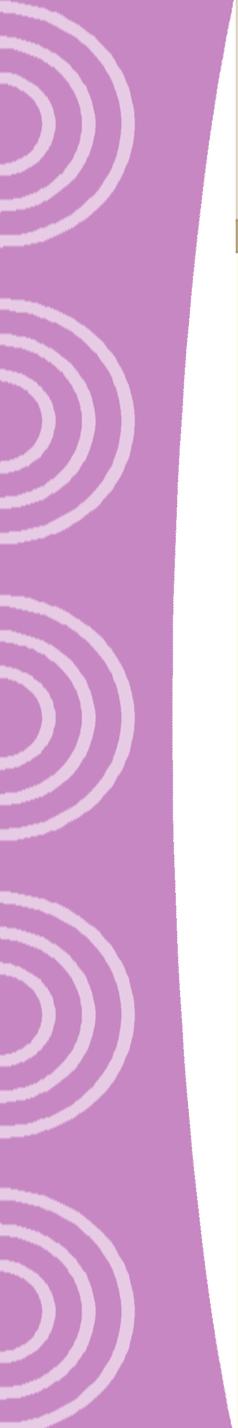
How Reliable Are Self-Report Answers?

- Common Sources of Bias
 - Response Set Bias
 - Social Desirability Bias

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- Only 1 Parent Answered “Yes” to Both Questions From the Lie Scale.
 - Their Data Were Removed Before Analyses.

Summary of Evaluation Results:

- Parents really read the newsletters.
- Parents share the newsletters with others.
- Parents rate the newsletters highly useful.
- Parents report positive changes in six key parenting behaviors.
- Risk group parents reported learning the most.



Recommendation: Continue Distribution of The Newsletter Series.

- Based on survey results
- Based on parents' comments

Summary Comments From Badger County Parents:

- “Thanks so much for the very informative newsletter. Now that my baby’s here I hope you have a newsletter for new parents. I’m certainly going to need one!”
- “I really liked the newsletter. It helped me remember all the information my doctor gave me – when sometimes it seemed like too much information. Since this is my first baby, I needed answers to so many questions.”

Acknowledgment of Project Partners:

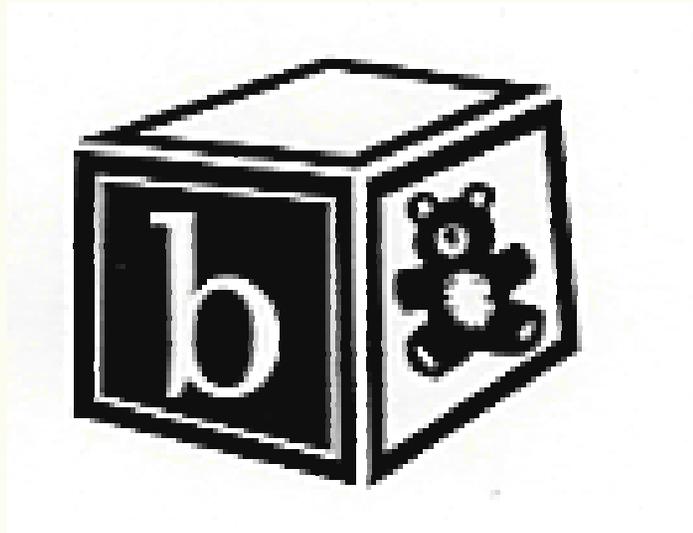
- Badger County WIC Program
- Badger County Department of Health & Human Services
- Community Memorial Hospital and Clinics of Badger Falls
- Support staff in the Badger County UW-Extension office

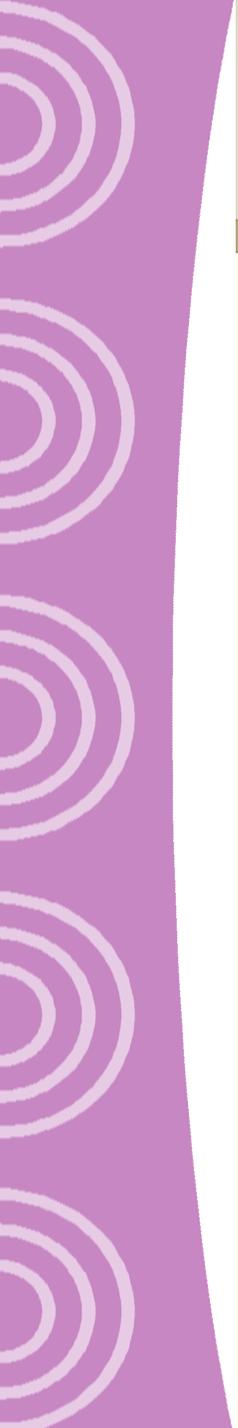
Co-Authors of Evaluation Study:

- Dr. Dave Riley,
UW-Madison/Extension
- Dr. Carol Ostergren,
UW-Madison/Extension

- And of course,

We thank the families who thoughtfully answered our survey.



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- Copies of the written report are available from the Badger County Extension Office.

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