First 5 Santa Cruz County



Annual Evaluation Report

July 1, 2025 - June 30, 2026

October 2026

Acknowledgements

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In addition, First 5 Santa Cruz County would like to thank the staff and participants of the funded partner agencies, whose commitment to data collection has facilitated the gathering of the robust data included in this report.

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Families Together

Program Description

Families Together provides prevention-based services to Santa Cruz County families experiencing hardships, such as involvement with Family and Children's Services (FCS), financial instability, and other adverse experiences. Families Together provides a menu of services with an emphasis on attachment, positive parenting, and trauma-informed approaches. Families referred to Families Together have access to services and resources that cover many domains of wellness, including emotional, social, financial, relational, and physical safety. Engagement in Families Together services is completely voluntary, and family led. Families that engage in services have the opportunity to work collaboratively with program staff to choose services that best fit their individual needs. Services are held in the home, community, or at program locations contingent upon each family's particular circumstances.

Families Together's mission is to aid and empower families in times of need or discord. By assisting these families, they can intervene early, before family difficulties escalate to the point of maltreatment or other adverse childhood experiences. Early intervention helps increase child safety, engage families in decision-making, and support healthy child development.

Families Together accepts referrals from FCS, CalWORKs, and the community (such as non-profit agencies, schools, and families directly).

Encompass Community Services is the lead agency for Families Together. Other partners, such as First 5 Santa Cruz County, Behavioral Health Services, Family and Children's Services, and CalWORKs also play critical contractual roles in the program.

Families Together's home visiting program includes comprehensive intake and risk assessments, development of a tailored case plan, parent support and education, child development activities, and periodic assessments. Using a strengths-based approach, participating families are encouraged to identify goals and objectives that will support healthy family relationships, child health and safety, positive parenting, family literacy, and school readiness.

One client's story

"Laura" was referred to Families Together (FT) along with her three children (age 5, 8, 13). At the time of the referral, Laura was in an extended relationship with her youngest child's father. The family was referred due to neglect of the three children by Laura's partner.

Families Together referred the father to MENtors for services and began working with Laura. During services it was determined that there was interpersonal violence occurring between Laura and her partner, along with financial abuse. The FT clinician worked with Laura on empowerment and safety planning for herself and her children.

While in services, Laura made the decision to end the relationship with her partner. The clinician provided individual therapy with Laura throughout the process, along with assessing the children for maladaptive behaviors.

Laura reports feeling stronger than she has ever felt and is grateful for the services she received.

- Families Together, Annual Progress Report

Population Served

	Families Together Pathway*				"Pathways" Subtotal [1] *All Pathways*	"Triple P-only" Subtotal [2] *Additional clients who only received Triple P services*	"County Referrals" Subtotal [3] *Additional clients reached through County referrals such as Thrive by 5, CalWORKs*	**2025-2026** *(Unique)* *Pathways + Triple P-only + County Referrals*
	Brief	Intensive	Pending	Exited early				
Parents/ Guardians	31	15	1	2	**49** *(with children ages 0-5)*	**36** *(with children of all ages)*	**16** *(with children of all ages)*	**101**
Children	36	30	0	4	*(ages 0-5)* **70**	*(ages 0-5)* **6** *(ages 6+)* **14** *(unknown age)* **81**	*(ages 0-5)* **23**	*(ages 0-5)* **99** *(ages 6+)* **14** *(unknown age)* **81**

Source: First 5 CCD database for July 1, 2025 – June 30, 2026.

* When clients begin services at Families Together, they complete a risk assessment and their results are used to guide the pathway assignment decision: families who score *Low* or *Moderate* work within the Brief Pathway with a Family Support Specialist for 3-6 months. Those who score *High* or *Very High* work within the Intensive Pathway for up to 12 months, also with a Family Support Specialist. If both parents are participating in their own services, their children are assigned the most intensive pathway of the two parents.

[1] The "Pathways Subtotal" reports the number of Families Together clients who are primary caregivers and who have a child under 6 years old, who worked within one of the First 5-funded Pathways and may also have received Triple P services.

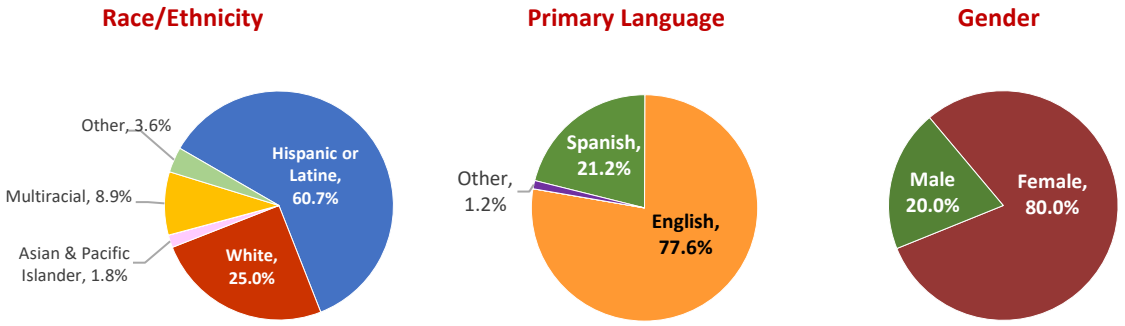
[2] The "Triple P-only Subtotal" reports Families Together clients who received Triple P services funded by First 5, but who don't fall into the "Pathways Subtotal" for various reasons, such as:

- The client is receiving no other services at Families Together except Triple P.
- The client participating in Triple P is a "secondary caregiver."
- The client participating in Triple P is a primary caregiver with no child under age 6 (Triple P is one of the only funded partners that reports the number of children ages 6+ who received services).
- The client participating in Triple P is a family member or friend of a Families Together client.
- The client participating in Triple P is a primary caregiver from a previous fiscal year who only received Triple P services during the current fiscal year.

Many "Triple P-only" children are of unknown age, as their parents participated in a brief level of Triple P where children's ages are not collected.

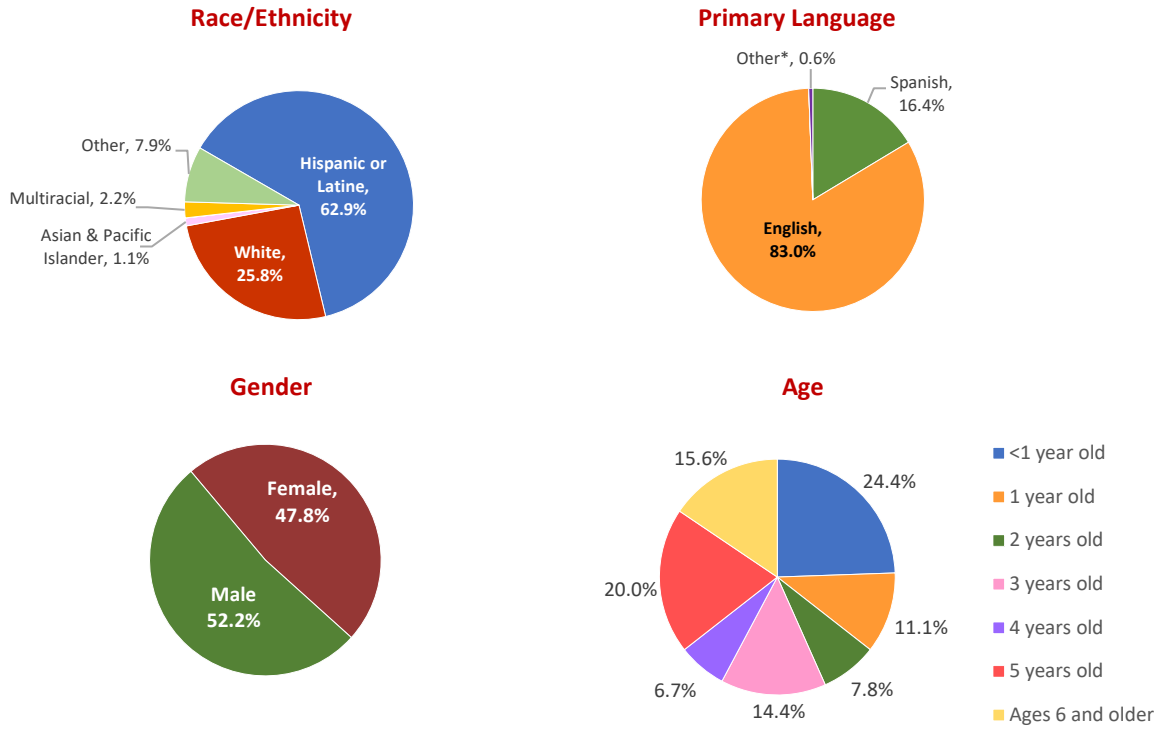
[3] The "County Referrals Subtotal" reports clients who were referred to Families Together through County referrals (such as Thrive by 5 and CalWORKs). These clients do not receive a risk assessment, which is why they are not assigned a "brief" or "intensive" pathway.

Figure 39: **Demographics of Parents/Guardians participating in Families Together (2025-26)**



Source: First 5 CCD database for July 1, 2025 – June 30, 2026.
Note: Clients with missing or unknown data for a demographic are excluded from that demographic's analysis.
N: (Race)=56; (Language)=85; (Gender)=85.

Figure 40: **Demographics of Children benefiting from Families Together (2025-26)**



Source: First 5 CCD database for July 1, 2025 – June 30, 2026.
Note: Clients with missing or unknown data for a demographic are excluded from that demographic's analysis.
N: (Ethnicity)=89; (Language)=171; (Gender)=90; (Age)=90.

Outcome Objective: Families receive referrals, initial assessments, and assigned services

Program Objectives	2025-2026
By June 30, 2026, accept referrals for a maximum of 120 families (with at least one child prenatal – age 5).	• **85** referrals
Of families who agree to a referral to Families Together (with at least one child prenatal – age 5), • Family Support Specialists will attempt to contact 100% of families who agree to a referral. and • 50% of clients approved for Families Together services (e.g., clients who were not denied services) will connect with a clinician and complete an initial meeting by June 30, 2026.	• **100%** of families were attempted to be contacted • **52.9%** of families approved for FT services had an initial meeting

Program Objectives	2025-2026
By June 30, 2026, a maximum of 90 primary caregivers (with at least one child prenatal – age 5) will receive individualized services from Families Together. Note: These individualized services included (but were not limited to) ASQ assessments, safety screenings in the home, Raising A Reader services, case management to relevant resources, counseling, client assistance, and Triple P services (including clients who *only* received Triple P services).	• **63** primary caregivers received these individualized services

Source: Families Together *Annual Progress Report*, 2026.

Outcome Objective: Families demonstrate decreased levels of risk

In Families Together, risk assessment serves a variety of purposes. Every family participating in Families Together that will be assigned to a service pathway is given a baseline risk assessment at the beginning of their services, and reassessments are administered in 6-month intervals (or at closing, if the case is open for less than 6 months). The assessments help staff link parents with the appropriate service pathways, such as brief or intensive services. Follow-up assessments help assess whether risk has been reduced.

Families Together currently uses two different ways to measure increased healthy parent-child relationships.

- One method uses the *Structured Decision Making: Family Prevention Services Screening Tool* (SDM-FPSST), which is a tool that assesses for traumatic or harmful life events that can increase the likelihood of the family's risk for child abuse or neglect. This assessment is also used to help staff assign families to the appropriate service pathway.
- Beginning in FY 2024-25, Families Together introduced the *Parenting and Family Adjustment Scales* (PAFAS) as a way to measure improvement in parenting and family adjustment.

Program Objective	2025-2026
Between July 1, 2025 through June 30, 2026, 70% of primary caregivers who participate in Families Together (with at least one child prenatal – age 5) will demonstrate increased healthy parent-child relationships based on their final assessment.	40.9% N=22

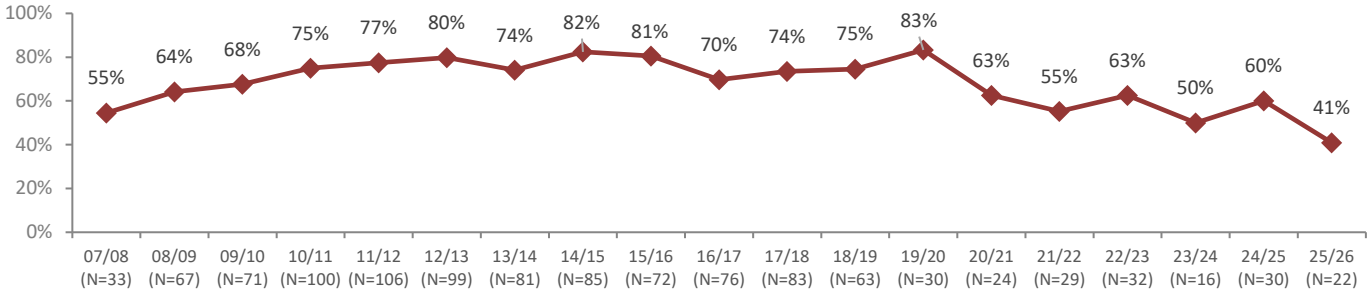
Source: First 5 Apricot database, *Structured Decision Making: Family Prevention Services Screening Tool* (SDM:FPSST) data, 2025-26.
Notes:

- Although very few families had a "low risk" score at baseline, these families were omitted from these analyses so that only those who could demonstrate reduced risk on the tool remained in the analysis.
- Clients who had at least one reassessment given during the fiscal year (1st, 2nd, or 3rd reassessment) were included in this analysis. Assessments completed after the end of the fiscal year were not included.
- Only includes clients who exited the program and have at least one child ages prenatal – age 5 at the time of the Baseline assessment.

As seen in the following figure, the *Structured Decision Making: Family Prevention Services Screening Tool* used in the Families Together program is helping to show that families reduce their level of risk while in the Families Together program.

- In 2025-26, 41% of parents (with at least one child prenatal – age 5) were found to have reduced their levels of risk by the end of program.
- The percentage of clients (with at least one child prenatal – age 5) who showed reduced levels of risk by the end of the program has been trending lower, from a high of 83% in 2020 to 41% in 2026.

Figure 41: **Percentage of Families Together clients (with at least one child prenatal – age 5) who showed decreased risk of child maltreatment based on their final assessment**



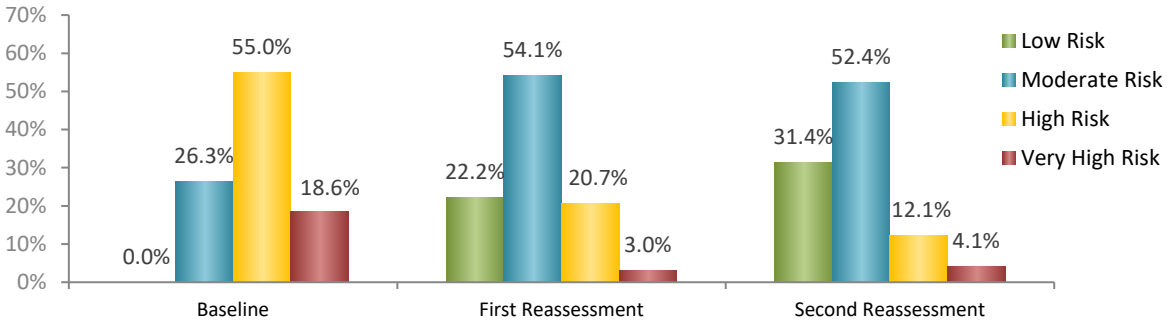
Source: First 5 Apricot database, *Structured Decision Making: Family Prevention Services Screening Tool* (SDM:FPSST) data.
Notes:

- Although very few families had a "low risk" score at baseline, these families were omitted from these analyses so that only those who could demonstrate reduced risk on the tool remained in the analysis.
- Only clients with at least one child prenatal – age 5 at the time of the Baseline assessment, who exited the program and had at least one reassessment during the fiscal year (1st, 2nd, or 3rd reassessment) were included in this analysis. Previous years' results have been modified to include this same population, and may also include additional data that weren't available when that year's results were initially calculated.
- Due to inaccuracies in data entry in 2006-07, clients with baseline assessments before 7/1/07 were omitted from this analysis.
- In 2008-09, the risk assessment included both families receiving intensive services and those receiving brief intervention services. Long-term clients were assessed at intake with reassessments at 6-month intervals, or at closing if the case was open for less than 6 months. Clients receiving brief interventions were assessed at intake and the end of services.

A second view of these risk assessment data looks at *how much* families improved over time, as they moved from "Very High Risk" to "Low Risk." In this analysis, only clients who exited the program after their 2nd Reassessment, and who had at least one child prenatal – age 5, were included, and the same set of families were analyzed at each assessment period (at baseline, 1st reassessment, and 2nd reassessment). Several years of data have been aggregated in order to present a more robust portrait of the extent to which Families Together participants are reducing their risk for future involvement with the child welfare system.

- Results indicate that the program is helping families reduce their level of risk. Of the 338 families that exited the program between 2007-2026 and completed three assessments, **74%** of families were assessed as being "high risk" or "very high risk" upon intake, and this dropped to **24%** six months later (1st reassessment). The percentage assessed as being "high" or "very high risk" dropped to **16%** for families who stayed in the program a full year (2nd reassessment).

Figure 42: **Of Families Together clients (with at least one child prenatal – age 5), change in risk levels during participation in the program (2007-2026)**



Source: First 5 Apricot database, *Structured Decision Making: Family Prevention Services Screening Tool* (SDM:FPSST) data, 2007-2026.
Notes:

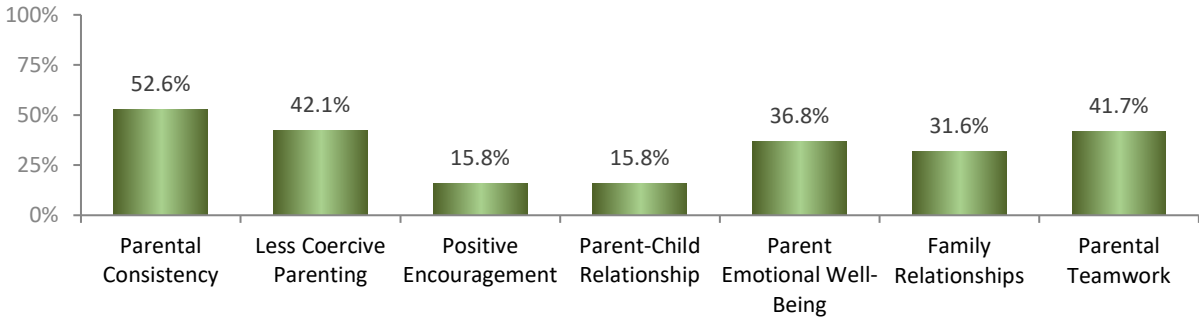
- Only clients who exited the program after their 2nd Reassessment, and who had at least one child prenatal – age 5 at the time of the Baseline assessment, were included in this analysis. The same set of families is analyzed at each assessment period.
- Although very few families had a "low risk" score at baseline, these families were omitted from these analyses so that only those who could demonstrate reduced risk on the tool remained in the analysis.
- Due to inaccuracies in data entry in 2006-07, clients with baseline assessments before 7/1/07 were omitted from this analysis.
- In 2008-09, the risk assessment included both families receiving intensive services and those receiving brief intervention services. Long-term clients were assessed at intake with reassessments at 6-month intervals, or at closing if the case was open for less than 6 months. Clients receiving brief interventions were assessed at intake and the end of services.

N = 338.

Additional analyses by First 5 Santa Cruz County in past years have confirmed that the improved levels of risk by the 1st and 2nd reassessments were the result of the impact of the Families Together program, rather than the result of a changing population of clients.

The *Parenting and Family Adjustment Scales (PAFAS)* is used to measure improvement in parenting and family adjustment. Because the number of clients completing this PAFAS is still very small, two years of data have been combined in order to present a more robust portrait of the extent to which clients are demonstrating improved parental emotional well-being and family relationships, and increased use of positive parenting styles.

Figure 43: **Percentage of Families Together clients who demonstrated improvement in parenting and family adjustment (2024-2026)**



Source: Families Together assessment results, *Parenting and Family Adjustment Scales (PAFAS)* subscales.
Note: This analysis only includes clients who had at least one child prenatal – age 5.
N: (Consistent parenting)=19; (Less coercive parenting)=19; (Positive encouragement)=19; (Parent-child relationship)=19; (Parent emotional well-being)=19; (Family relationships)=19; (Parental teamwork)=12.

Outcome Objective: Families do not experience a high rate of recurrence of abuse

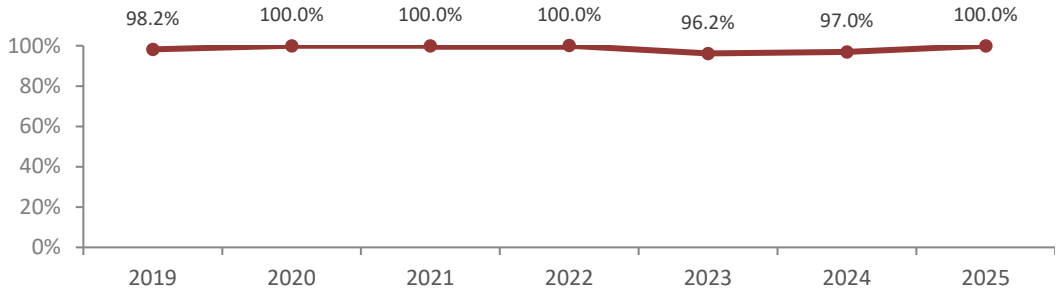
- Of the 41 families (that had at least one child prenatal – age 5) who received services from Families Together *and* had their cases closed in the 2025 calendar year:

  - Results showed that **100%** of families who received services from Families Together **did not have a substantiated allegation of abuse** for at least 6 months after case closure. This figure is in keeping with the high percentage of families reported in previous years' results.

Program Objective		2025
At least 95% of families (with at least one child prenatal – age 5) that participate in the Differential Response program will not have a substantiated allegation of abuse at least 6 months after case closure.	Families that have at least one child prenatal – age 5	100% N=41

Source: Santa Cruz County Human Services Department, 2026.
Note: Data are for the calendar year, in order to allow at least a 6-month period after case closure.

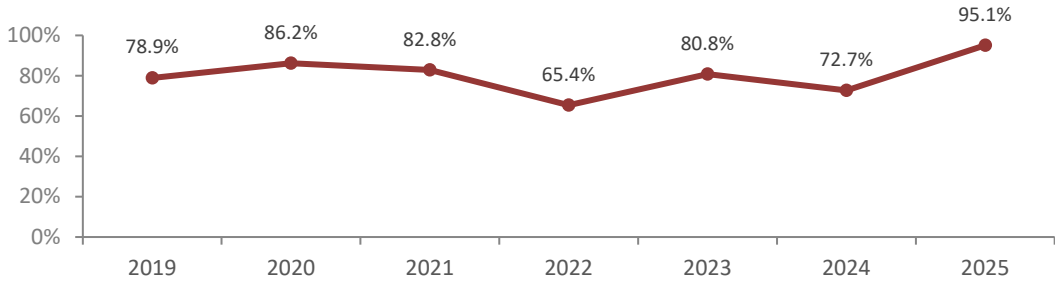
Figure 44: **Percentage of Families Together participants (with at least one child prenatal – age 5) who did not have a substantiated allegation of abuse at least 6 months after case closure from Families Together**



Source: Santa Cruz County Human Services Department, 2026.
Note: Data are for the calendar year, in order to allow at least a 6-month period after case closure.
N: (2019)=57; (2020)=29; (2021)=29; (2022)=26; (2023)=26; (2024)=33, (2025)=41.

- An additional study found that **95%** of families **did not have a re-referral to child welfare** within six months after their exit from Families Together, which is an increase from previous years.

Figure 45: **Percentage of families (that had at least one child prenatal – age 5) without a re-referral to Child Welfare within 6 months after exit from Families Together**



Source: Santa Cruz County Human Services Department, 2026.
Note: Data are for the calendar year, in order to allow at least a 6-month period after case closure.
N: (2019)=57; (2020)=29; (2021)=29; (2022)=26; (2023)=26; (2024)=33, (2025)=41.

Outcome Objective: Families will have access to parenting support services structured by the Triple P curriculum

Program Objective	2025-2026
Between July 1, 2025 and June 30, 2026, Families Together will provide Positive Parenting Program (Triple P) education to approximately 70 caregivers with at least one child age 0-5 (unduplicated), throughout Santa Cruz County.	36 unique caregivers

Source: First 5 Santa Cruz County, *Triple P 2025-26 Master Analysis template*, 2026.
Note: Many clients participated in more than one Triple P service.

Triple P Outcomes

After participating in Triple P services at Families Together, parents reported improvements in their children's emotional and behavioral challenges, and increased use of positive parenting styles.

Figure 46: **Summary of Families Together's Triple P Objectives (2025-26)**

Triple P Objectives	Results
• 70% of parents/caregivers who complete Level 3 Individual or Brief Group sessions report an increase in confidence in their parenting abilities.	• Due to the small number of clients who completed Level 3 services, there are not enough data to analyze this objective. *N = 1.*

Source: Parenting Experience Survey (Question 3) Confidence in Parental Responsibilities.

Triple P Objectives	Results
• 70% of parents/caregivers who complete a Level 4 or Level 5 service report an improvement in child behaviors [37]	• Due to the small number of clients who completed Level 4 or 5 services, there are not enough data to analyze this objective. *N = 7.*
(Source: CAPES: Total Intensity Subscale)	
• 70% of parents/caregivers who complete a Level 4 or Level 5 service report an improvement in: o consistent parenting o less coercive parenting o positive encouragement o parent-child relationships	• Due to the small number of clients who completed Level 4 or 5 services, there are not enough data to analyze these objectives. *N = (consistent parenting)=5; (less coercive parenting)=5; (positive encouragement)=4, (parent-child relationships)=1.*
Source: PAFAS: 4 Parenting Scale Subscales (consistent parenting, coercive parenting, positive encouragement, parent-child relationship)	

Sources:
- (Assessment data) VerticalChange & First 5 Santa Cruz County, 2026.
- (Assessment analyses) First 5 Santa Cruz County, 2026.

[37] For all analyses of improvement, only clients who had room to improve are included. Clients who already achieved the "best" score on the assessment at the beginning of their services are not included in these analyses, since they have no room to improve.