

**UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS MEDICAL SCHOOL (HOUSTON) STUDY  
ON THE EFFECTIVENESS OF THE ARK (ADULTS RELATING TO  
KIDS) PROGRAM AS A MEANS OF ELEVATING THE SELF-ESTEEM  
OF THE ADULT PARTICIPANTS  
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**THE BACKGROUND**

In 1994, the ARKGroup--in cooperation with Dr. Ron Lorimar of the University of Texas School of Public Health (Houston)--conducted ground-breaking research (published in Self-Esteem Today) which establishes the primary connection between a child's sense of self-esteem and the quality of his relationships with the primary adults (parents and teachers) in his life. When a child feels unconditionally loved for who she is rather than for what she does, she is enabled to value herself in spite of her imperfections. The resultant sense of high self-esteem allows children to develop the inner strength to withstand the negative peer pressure that leads to anti-social, addictive, and self-destructive behavior.

In response to this research, the ARKGroup created the ARK (Adults Relating to Kids) Program. Utilizing a small-group, peer-mentoring format, ARK combines cutting-edge self-esteem research with the very best in current parenting and teaching theory. The result is a learning environment in which adults can appropriate new parenting and teaching skills and can increase their ability to give young people the unconditional love and the nurture that allows children to value themselves. ARK helps parents to address the practical aspects of parenting--dealing with topics such as homework, sibling rivalry, and bully-proofing. Meeting once a week, ARK Groups teach adults how to discipline the behavior while still affirming the worth of the child.

Parenting behaviors typically are passed on from generation to generation within families, usually without anyone stepping back and evaluating those behaviors and deciding upon new and more appropriate ways of relating to their children. ARK is a tool for encouraging a process of evaluation, thereby enabling families to set in motion new parenting patterns that will enhance the lives of their children and their children's children for generations to come.

**THE SETTING**

The ARKGroup for Self Esteem was invited by the Texas Department of Criminal Justice, the world's third-largest penal system (behind Russia and China) to conduct an ARK Program at Plane State Jail, a correctional facility for women in Dayton, Texas. The two types of correctional institutions in Texas include the "state prisons" for inmates convicted of regular and severe felonies and the "state jails" for confinees who have been convicted of lesser felonies--such as minor drug possession--and who will be imprisoned for two years or less. The women who participated in the ARK Program at Plane State Jail (a state jail facility) would be out of prison and back in relationship with their children and families within a matter of months.

While the Plane State Jail women who participated in ARK volunteered to do so in order to learn how to give unconditional love and to build the self-esteem of their children upon their re-entry

into general society, the same principles would also logically apply to relationships between adults. Therefore, if the women at Plane State Jail practiced the principles of giving unconditional love within the context of an ARK Group--hoping to learn how to apply those principles in their relationships with their children--their own personal level of self-esteem would elevate as well. To test this premise, the ARK Group entered into a study agreement with the University of Texas Medical School (Houston) to evaluate the self-esteem level of Plane State Jail participants in the ARK Program before and after their participation in ARK.

#### THE STUDY PARAMETERS

The study director was a member of the faculty at the University of Texas Medical School (Houston), Dr. Maria E. Ferris, MD, MPH. Permission was granted from Freda S. Ritchie, Warden at the Plane State Jail, for the ARK Program and the corresponding study to be offered at the prison. Each Plane State Jail participant signed a Medical School-approved "Informed Consent Form," indicating her willingness to participate in the study.

Two sessions of the ARK Program were conducted at the Plane State Jail facility, each consisting of seventeen weekly sessions with the detainees. The first session was conducted January to May, 2000, and the second was conducted August to November, 2000. A total of 47 women participated in the two sessions. At each of the two sessions, a self-esteem survey was administered to each woman at the start of the first ARK meeting and then again at the last ARK meeting.

The participants were an ethnic mixture of African-American (approximately 60%), Hispanic (approximately 30%), and Anglo (approximately 10%) females. The average IQ of the participants was 95.

#### THE STUDY INSTRUMENT

The self-concept survey used to test the ARK participants at Plane State Jail was approved by the University of Texas Medical School (Houston) and is a composite of three respected survey instruments: the Wilkerson Self-Concept Scale (with a high reliability of .83 in previous testings), the highly-regarded Kaplan and Porkorny Self-Derogation Scale, and a self-esteem/self concept survey published in a University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill study entitled "The National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health."

- The Wilkerson-Concept Scale consists of eight statements:

1. I like myself.
2. I feel good about my body.
3. I am an important person.
4. What I think matters.
5. I feel like I am a winner.
6. I feel glad I am alive.
7. I think I can achieve my goals.
8. I believe that my life makes a difference.

- The Kaplan and Porkorny Self-Derogation Scale consists of seven statements:

1. I wish I could have more respect for myself.
2. All in all, I tend to feel that I am a failure.

3. I certainly feel useless at times.
4. I take a positive attitude toward myself.
5. On the whole, I am satisfied with myself.
6. At times, I think I am no good at all.
7. I feel I do not have much to be proud of.
- The Chapel Hill study includes ten statements:
  1. I have a lot of energy.
  2. When I do get sick, I get better quickly.
  3. I am well coordinated.
  4. I have a lot of good qualities.
  5. I am physically fit.
  6. I have a lot to be proud of.
  7. I like myself just the way I am.
  8. I feel like I am doing everything just about right.
  9. I feel socially accepted.
  10. I feel loved and wanted.

The participants were asked to read the 25 survey statements and then to rank their feelings toward each statement by indicating the extent to which they agreed or disagreed with them. The options to be checked were “Strongly Agree,” “Agree,” “Uncertain,” “Disagree,” and “Strongly Disagree.”

#### THE STUDY RESULTS

The composite score (of the three testing instruments) of each ARK participant was graded on a percentage scale ranging from zero to 100, and the results of the two 17-week sessions of the ARK Program at Plane State Jail are as follows:

- First Session (27 matches) Pre-ARK: 62% Post-ARK: 84%
- Second Session (20 matches) Pre-ARK: 67% Post-ARK: 83%
- Composite: (47 matches) Pre-ARK: 64% Post-ARK: 84%

#### CONCLUSIONS

The research at Plane State Jail shows a significant increase in the degree in which participants value themselves as a result of their completing the ARK parenting course. As they practiced giving and receiving unconditional love with one another (in preparation for giving unconditional love and raising the self-esteem of their children), the ARK Group members themselves registered an average increase of 20 percentage points in their individual self-concepts.

The study indicates that participation in the ARK Program, while intended as a parenting tool to elevate the self-esteem of children, produces similar results in the adult participants as well. The ramifications of this study are important because adults can only pass on to children what they themselves possess.