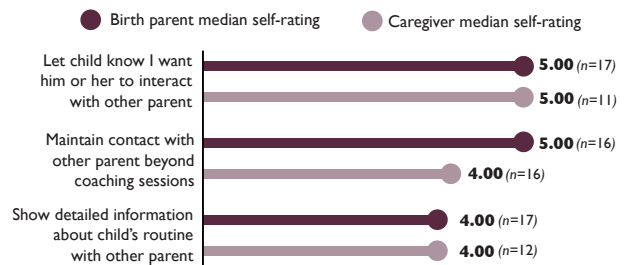# *Safe Babies* ▸

## Program Evaluation Report Brief

Safe Babies seeks to lessen the long-term impact of abuse and neglect, increase the likelihood of family reunification, and ensure that developmentally appropriate and trauma-informed policies guide the care and transitions of infants and toddlers in the child welfare system. The Safe Babies program accomplishes this through four core components, Fostering Relationships Coparenting Model, Education and Technical Assistance, Coordination of Care and Continuous Evaluation. First3Years contracts with the Texas Institute for Child & Family Wellbeing at The University of Texas at Austin, Steve Hicks School of Social Work to evaluate the Safe Babies program. Researchers use data from surveys and interviews with birth parents and caregivers who participate in the program, surveys and focus groups with stakeholders who work with the program, and Department of Family and Protective Services administrative data to answer the following research question: **Do children who participate in the Safe Babies program have better permanence and wellbeing outcomes compared to children who do not participate in the program?**

## KEY FINDINGS

**1**

Support for coparenting between birth parents and caregivers is a major area of strength for the program, with birth parents and caregivers demonstrating a high level of engagement in coparenting activities and stakeholders demonstrating support for coparenting and understanding of the benefit for children.
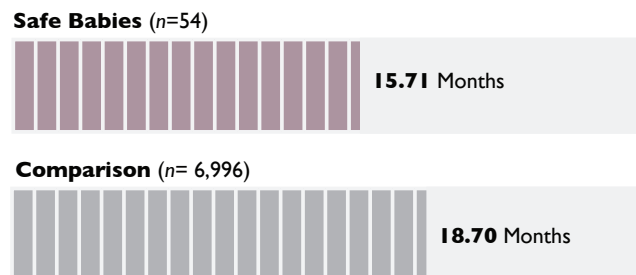
### COPARENTING ACTIVITIES



● Birth parent median self-rating ● Caregiver median self-rating

Let child know I want him or her to interact with other parent — **5.00** (*n*=17)
— **5.00** (*n*=11)

Maintain contact with other parent beyond coaching sessions — **5.00** (*n*=16)
— **4.00** (*n*=16)

Show detailed information about child's routine with other parent — **4.00** (*n*=17)
— **4.00** (*n*=12)

*Footnote: Scale was from (1-"never") to (5-"Always"). Higher ratings indicate better engagement in coparenting activities.*

**2**

Time to permanence was significantly shorter for children in Safe Babies than children in the comparison group, and the proportion of children across exit outcome categories differed significantly between groups, with a greater percentage of children in Safe Babies returning home than the comparison group (46% vs. 27%).

### AVERAGE TIME TO PERMENANCE

**Safe Babies** (*n*=54)



**15.71** Months

**Comparison** (*n*= 6,996)

**18.70** Months

**3** Most stakeholders involved in the program have received training related to development and attachment, though only approximately one-quarter of participants receive this training directly from Safe Babies. Stakeholders demonstrate a strong understanding of the relationship between development, attachment, and transitions such as visitations and placement changes for children.

> " *I think the one phrase that I've heard from [Safe Babies] more often than any other is that attachment is built by proximity. If you're not in proximity of the child, you can't build attachment with the child. I know, for me, it has made me more conscious of the visitation plan that's in place.*
>
> **– Stakeholder Focus Group Participant**

**4** Birth parents feel supported by the Safe Babies program, and stakeholders and caregivers generally hold positive beliefs about birth parents, with room to support stakeholders in their beliefs about birth parents continuing to parent after certain instances of maltreatment have occurred.

> " *Honestly, the support that I got from [Safe Babies coordinator], I feel like that made a huge impact on my mental health, my decision-making skills, holding onto hope, stuff like that.*
>
> **– Birth Parent Interviewee**

# RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Build capacity for the Safe Babies program to serve more families in each county, and generate more understanding and awareness for the program with stakeholders outside of the program in order to improve its reach.

2. Work to increase stakeholder participation in First3Years educational offerings to ensure that people involved in the program have access to relevant trainings, ensuring stakeholders remain up-to-date and aligned with the research on development, attachment, and how to best serve infants and toddlers in the child welfare system.

3. Continue to work with stakeholders to improve practices around visitation and other transitions (such as placement changes and reunifications) within the child welfare system. In cases where Safe Babies is not formally involved, provide "transition consultations" to ensure these cases see the benefit of improved transitions for children.

**Evaluation By:**

The University of Texas at Austin
**Texas Institute for Child & Family Wellbeing**
*Steve Hicks School of Social Work*

**Prepared For:**

**SAFE BABIES**
A FIRST3YEARS INITIATIVE