

This article is based on the following Campbell Review:

Piquero A, Farrington D, Welsh B, Tremblay R, Jennings W: *Effects of early family/parent training programs on antisocial behavior and delinquency*. Campbell Collaboration, 2008



This article was written by SFI Campbell and has been approved by the authors of the review.

See also www.nc2.net

LITTLE TROUBLE-MAKERS CAN BE HELPED

Family/parent training programs can provide parents with tools to raise their children. This can help them deal with children's behavior problems. The programs prevent later antisocial behavior and delinquency in children and they have a positive influence in later life in areas such as partnerships, education and work. This has been documented by a Campbell Review of the most solid international research results.

BEHAVIOR PROBLEMS INCREASE RISKS OF LATER DELINQUENCY

When young children hit or terrorize their comrades, or exhibit other behavior problems, early intervention is vital. Little trouble-makers are at greater risk of developing into big trouble-makers.

Research indicates that young children with problem behavior are more likely to end in a life of crime than other children. They also have several additional problems later in adolescence and adulthood. For example they will have more difficulties at school and they will find it harder to achieve educational qualifications than other young people. They are also more exposed to unemployment and are more likely to have problems in partnerships. As research also indicates that it becomes more difficult to change these children's behavior as time passes, early prevention has received great political and professional interest.

The majority of youth crime is committed by a hard core of young people. The police and probation services are aware of them, and they are very resource demanding for society. It is important to try and get hold of them while they are still just little trouble-makers. In recent years, therefore, many countries have started using family/parent training programs in an attempt to prevent delinquency and youth crime.

Family/parent training programs are aimed at parents of children with behavior problems and aggressive behavior. There are programs for

children of all ages, but this review concentrates on programs for parents of children between 0 and 5 years old.

The aim of the programs is to enhance and develop parents' ability to be parents for their children. Alternatively psychological or other professional treatment of the child with problems could be applied, but in applying family/parent training programs, the focus is on the parents rather than the children. The goal is to improve parents' abilities to build a good relationship with their child and to raise their child well. More specifically, training parents involves being better at interacting with their child, praising, setting limits and being consistent in their parenting and discipline.

A better relationship between parents and the child helps the child control impulsive, oppositional and aggressive behavior. In the most successful cases the child stops being a little trouble-maker altogether. If problem behavior is mitigated in early childhood, the child will experience fewer problems in adolescence and adulthood with a smaller risk that the little trouble-maker develops into a big trouble-maker.

FAMILY/PARENT TRAINING PROGRAMMES MEAN FEWER BEHAVIOR PROBLEMS

The Review indicates that family/parent training programs are effective. Children from families who received training cope much better than children from families who did not receive training. In the families who did not take part in the family/parent training program, 5 out of 10 children continued to exhibit problem behavior after completion of treatment. On the other hand, only 3 out of 10 continued to have problems in families who did take part in the program. Therefore, family/parent training programs help reduce the number of little trouble-makers and in doing so, in the long term, the number of big trouble-makers. At the same time, the Review also shows that for some the children, behavior problems disappear over the life course anyway, without any preventive efforts.

FAMILY/PARENT TRAINING PROGRAMS

Many different types of family/parent training programs are included in the studies. They all share the common objective to improve parents' competencies regarding their children and thereby improve their children's behavior. Parent training is carried out by professional therapists and can either take place at a private clinic, at school or at a municipal facility. Training can be either individual or group based.

Although the programs have the same overall objective, they have different ways of tackling the problem. The most common family/parent training program is *The Incredible Years*. The program was developed in the US, and therapists make much use of video recordings in their work with parents. Two other common programs are the *Triple P - Positive Parenting Program* and *Parent-Child Interaction Therapy (PCIT)*. *Triple P* was developed in Australia and its main characteristic is that the

scope of the program is adjusted according to the scope of the family's problems. *PCIT* was also developed in the US and it differs from the two other programs in that the therapist guides the parents directly during their interaction with the child.

A few of the studies involved home visitation by a nurse, doctor or paraprofessional. Visits commenced during pregnancy or while the child was still a baby and comprised advice on managing the child's behavior. The Review found no differences between the effect of home visits and the other family/parent training programs, i.e. they are equally effective.

ABOUT THE REVIEW

There are 55 different studies in the Review covering a total of almost 10,000 children under 5 years old. The studies come from throughout the world, including the US, the UK, Canada, the Netherlands, New Zealand and China. The studies cover more than 30 years, the oldest being published in 1976, and the most recent in 2008.

All the studies were randomized controlled experiments which compared a group who took part in a family/parent training program with a control group. The children in the control group were usually put on a waiting list to take part in the family/parent training program at a later date. This is a widespread and good method of making solid assessments of promising programs. On the one hand the randomization ensures that the effects can be measured, while on the other hand the waiting list ensures that the children in the control group are not, in the long term, excluded from taking part in the program once the effects have been documented. The results have been gathered using questionnaires on the behavior of the children, answered by parents, teachers or independent observers. Many different standardized questionnaires were used. The most commonly used was the Achenbach Child Behavior Checklist (CBCL) and the Eyberg Child Behavior Inventory (ECBI).
