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Effects of parenting programmes

A review of six Campbell systematic reviews

What is this review of reviews about?

Parenting programmes are provided to parents to enhance parents' knowledge, skills and understanding and so improve both child and parent behavioural and psychological outcomes.

These programmes are typically offered to parents over the course of eight to 12 weeks, for about one to two hours each week, although the range varies from as few as two sessions to as many as twenty.

Underpinned by a range of theoretical approaches, parenting programmes use a range of techniques, including discussion, role-play, watching video vignettes, and homework.

Using a standardized, manual-based programme or curriculum, parenting programmes can be delivered on a one-to-one basis or to groups of parents and are provided in a number of settings, ranging from hospital or social work clinics to community-based settings such as general practitioner (GP) surgeries, schools and churches.

Six systematic reviews have been published by the Campbell Collaboration evaluating the effectiveness of a range of parenting programmes covering outcomes for children aged 0 – 3 years; addressing early onset



Parenting programmes use a range of techniques including discussion, role-play, watching video vignettes and homework

conduct disorder; improving outcomes for children with ADHD; and improving the psychosocial functioning of parents, and outcomes for particular groups of parents, such as those with intellectual disabilities and teenage parents.



What have we learned from Campbell reviews of parenting programmes?

There are many studies evaluating the effectiveness of parenting programmes (e.g. a review published in 2012 included over 40 studies).

But coverage varies by topic area, with one review having as few as three included studies and another as few as five.

These reviews provide unequivocal evidence showing that parenting programmes are effective in improving aspects of parents'

psychosocial functioning (e.g., depression, anxiety, stress, anger, guilt, confidence, and satisfaction with the partner relationship) in the short-term.

Behavioural and cognitive-behavioural group-based parenting interventions have also been found to be effective and cost-effective methods of improving child conduct problems, parental mental health and parenting skills in the short term, in the parents of children aged 3 – 12 years. The evidence for effectiveness with parents of younger children is less comprehensive.

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There is also some evidence that parenting programmes can improve parental stress and general child behaviour in children with ADHD, but there is less evidence with regard to other important outcomes, including ADHD-related behavioural achievement in school, or parent knowledge of ADHD.

It is not possible to assess from the limited evidence whether parent training is better delivered in groups or individually.

The evidence with regard to the needs of specific groups of parents such as teenage parents and parents with intellectual disability looks promising, with improved outcomes for both parent and children. However, further research is still needed.

What questions remain?

The available evidence shows only short-term effectiveness, and a number of reviews have concluded that further input may be required to ensure that these results are maintained. The use of 'top-ups' to maintain the benefits of these interventions needs formal evaluation.

More research is needed to assess benefits for fathers, examine the comparative effectiveness of different types of programmes, and identify the mechanisms by which such programmes bring about

improvements in parental functioning and outcomes for children.

More studies are also needed of the effectiveness of parenting programmes for parents with particular needs (e.g. teenage parents and parents with intellectual disabilities), including parents of children with ADHD.

Examples of the use of evidence from a Campbell systematic review of parenting programmes

Three Campbell reviews conducted by Professor Jane Barlow of the University of Warwick on parent training and conduct disorder, and socioemotional development of young children have been part of a broader body of work that has been used in the UK to inform NICE guidelines.

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This work has supported roll-out of parenting and school-based programmes. For example, the Parenting Early Intervention Programme (PEIP) has been introduced across all local authorities in England, resulting in significant improvement in parenting skills and the mental health of both parents and children.

Reference to Professor Barlow's work has been included in WHO and European Commission policy, and in international policy documents beyond Europe.

Included Campbell reviews

Barlow, J., Smailagic, N., Huband, N., Roloff, V., and Bennett, C. (2012) Group-based parent training programmes for improving parental psychosocial health: A systematic review 2012:15, DOI: 10.4073/csr.2012.15

Barlow, J., Smailagic, N., Bennett, C., Huband, N., Jones, H., and Coren, E. (2011). Individual and group based parenting programmes for improving psychosocial outcomes for teenage parents and their children: A systematic review 2011:2, DOI 10.4073/csr.2011.2

Barlow, J. and Parsons, J. (2005) Group-based parent-training programmes for improving emotional and behavioural adjustment in 0-3 year-old children: A systematic review 2005:2, DOI: 10.4073/csr.2005.2

Coren, E., Hutchfield, J., Thomae, M., and Gustafsson, C. (2010) Parent-training interventions to support intellectually disabled parents: A systematic review 2010:3, DOI: 10.4073/csr.2010.3

Furlong, M., McGilloway, S., Bywater, T., Hutchings, J., Donnelly, M., and Smith, S. (2012) Behavioural and cognitive-behavioural group-based parenting programmes for early-onset conduct problems in children aged 3 to 12 years: A systematic review 2012:12, DOI: 10.4073/csr.2012.12

Zwi, M., Jones, H., Thorgaard, C., York, A., and Dennis, J. (2012) Parent training interventions for Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder: A systematic review 2012:2, DOI: 10.4073/csr.2012.2

About Campbell

The Campbell Collaboration is an international network devoted to producing a world library of systematic reviews of research to inform social policy and practice decisions and improve human wellbeing worldwide.

This Campbell policy brief was written by Professor Jane Barlow.

