

Can interventions designed to improve parenting and family functioning help kids' behaviour and keep them out of trouble?

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The Bottom Line:

Family and parenting interventions can be effective in the management of conduct disorder and delinquency as measured by a reduction in the time spent in juvenile justice facilities. High quality research is necessary to determine whether or not interventions can improve overall family functioning or parenting practices in families with children aged 10-17.

What problem is being addressed?

[Conduct disorder](#) and delinquency are significant problems for children and adolescents, exacting an enormous emotional toll on individuals and families, and placing huge pressures on our health, social and juvenile justice systems. A number of family and parenting interventions have been recommended and are used for these conditions, but are they effective in improving the long-term psychosocial outcomes for these children?

What intervention is being tested?

This review looked at a range of parenting and family interventions to determine their effectiveness in managing conduct disorder and delinquency. The studies reported on the effectiveness of family and parenting interventions on child and adolescent behaviour, parenting practices, parental mental health, family functioning and relationships, running away and family reunion, school performance, criminality, risk of re-arrest, length of time in institutions, risk of incarceration, self-reported delinquency, future employment, sibling delinquency, and peer relations.

What is the *real scientific* evidence?

The authors searched the literature for parenting or family functioning interventions that used at least one objective test such as the arrest rate or family functioning to determine their effectiveness in managing conduct disorder and delinquency. The data from the 8 studies that met the inclusion/exclusion criteria for the review showed that interventions aimed at improving parenting practices and family functioning reduced the amount of time spent by the child/adolescent in institutions and may have reduced the incidence of re-arrest. In particular, [Multi-systemic Therapy](#) and [Multi-dimensional Treatment Foster Care](#), two broad-based interventions that target family and other influences such as

parenting, school and peer relationships, were found to have beneficial effects in reducing the length of time spent by juvenile delinquents in institutions.

There is evidence from this review that the interventions may also reduce the likelihood of siblings becoming delinquent. There was no significant evidence that parenting and family functioning interventions had a positive effect on parenting practices, parental mental health, family functioning, school performance, future employment, or peer relationships. There is insufficient evidence that these interventions improve overall family functioning or parenting practices that are associated with conduct disorder or child/adolescent delinquency.

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The preceding is a summary of:

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