

## **Group-based parenting programs are known to improve behaviour problems in children aged 3-10. But are they effective for younger children?**

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### **The Bottom Line:**

This review found that there is some evidence showing the effectiveness of group parenting programs designed to improve child emotional and behavioural adjustment. However, there was little data available to support a finding that the intervention effects were long-lasting. More research using good research methods is needed to answer the questions posed by the review authors and to determine when, how, and to whom parenting interventions can or should be delivered.

### **What problem is being addressed?**

Research suggests that a child's early environment is important in establishing patterns of emotional, cognitive and social functioning that will influence the child's future development and mental health. Parenting programs have been shown to improve behaviour problems in children aged 3-10. But are they effective for children younger than age 3? This review examines whether parenting programs as a form of early intervention can prevent emotional and behavioural problems and, in particular, whether group-based parenting programs are effective for children younger than 3 years of age.

### **What intervention is being tested?**

Programs designed to teach parenting practices associated with good behavioural and emotional adjustment in infants and toddlers under the age of 3. Two of the included studies looked at Webster-Stratton's "[Incredible Years](#)", one looked at a [cognitive-behavioural](#) program, another compared [behavioural parent training](#) methods, and the last looked at the effectiveness of a small group cognitive-behavioural approach in parents at risk for using harsh parenting practices.

### **What is the *real scientific* evidence?**

The authors examined 5 [randomized controlled trials](#) that looked at improvement in emotional and behavioural problems as judged by parents and independent assessors. They conducted meta-analyses of the findings from all 5 studies, and also looked at follow-up data derived from 2 of the studies to see whether the effects persisted after the intervention ended.

The findings of all 5 studies taken together showed no significant improvement in emotional and behavioural adjustment based on the parents' own ratings of their children. Only one program – an 8-week group-based behavioural parent training program – was found to have positive effects based on the parents' ratings as measured by the [Child Behaviour Questionnaire](#) and the [Home Situations Questionnaire](#).

However, independent observers reported significant improvement in the children's emotional and behavioural problems, when all 5 studies were taken into account. In particular, a 10-hour group-based cognitive behavioural parenting program delivered over the course of 4 sessions was found to have significant benefits as measured by the [Behaviour Screening Questionnaire](#).

Follow-up data was available from only two of the studies – the two studies looking at Webster-Stratton's "[Incredible Years](#)". While a meta-analysis of these findings showed a positive effect, it was not found to be statistically significant.

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The preceding is a summary of:

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