

Success of Incredible Years program shows good parenting promotes good behaviour in children

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The Bottom Line:

The IncredibleYears, a 12-week group-based parenting program developed by Carolyn Webster-Stratton, a professor in the University of Washington School of Nursing, has shown success in building positive parenting techniques in parents and reducing aggression and other antisocial behaviours in their children. This study lends support to the idea that parenting style has a strong influence on whether or not children develop [conduct disorder](#). It also suggests that changing parents' parenting attitudes and behaviour can have a positive effect on their children's behaviour.

What problem is being addressed?

Young children who show high levels of aggression and don't respect adult authority often go on to adopt antisocial and even criminal behavior as they get older. Up to 20% of children who come from socially disadvantaged areas, whose parents have problems with alcohol or use illicit drugs, have mental health problems, or poor parenting skills develop conduct problems.

Interventions aimed at reducing the risks related to lack of positive parenting skills, the parents' sense of competence to raise their children, or the stress and depression they may be experiencing can lead to better outcomes for the children, and can help reduce the incidence of [conduct disorder](#).

What intervention is being tested?

Parents from socially disadvantaged areas in Wales, with children aged between 36 and 59 months, took part in the Incredible Years parenting program developed by Webster-Stratton. The goals of the program are to teach parents to encourage their children, use effective positive discipline techniques, and deal with their own feelings of depression and stress. The program is being used in Wales as part of a government-sponsored program called Sure Start to help families learn ways to improve their children's lives.

What is the *real scientific* evidence?

Parents who participated in the study were taught to use praise and incentives for acceptable behavior, build a strong, affectionate bond with their child, set clear expectations and limits for behaviour, and use gentle and consistent consequences

(instead of harsh punishment) for problem behaviour. Parents were helped to identify new ways of interacting with their children through role playing, modelling of good parenting practices, practising new skills, discussions, and analysis of videotape teaching. Instead of being conducted in a university laboratory setting, this study was carried out in the community to test whether or not it worked “in the real world.”

At follow up, parents were found to have adopted better ways of behaving towards their children. The use of positive parenting techniques increased and children’s behaviour problems decreased compared to the control group. As well, the behaviour and well-being of siblings of the children enrolled in the study improved, suggesting that the whole family benefited from the intervention.

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The preceding is a summary of:

Hutchings J, Bywater T, Daley D, Gardner F, Whitaker C, Jones K, Eames C, Edwards TH. *Parenting intervention in Sure Start services for children at risk of developing conduct disorder: Pragmatic randomised controlled trial*. British Medical Journal 2007, 334: 678