

## Parenting programs that work

Parenting programs abound but very few have been studied rigorously to determine whether they are actually effective. Two programs do have evidence to support their effectiveness. **Triple P – The Positive Parenting Program** and **The Incredible Years** have been tested with different ethnic and racial groups and parents from varying socio-economic backgrounds. Both programs have been found to improve parenting skills and child behaviour, as well as the parents' own mental health. **The Incredible Years** has also been shown to improve behaviour management skills for teachers.

All parents have problems with their children at one time or another. They may be afraid they will “spoil” their children, or they may not know how to handle tantrums or disobedience. Parenting is so important that parents do need some kind of assistance. There's no shortage of this – parenting programs and other strategies claiming to improve one's parenting skills abound – but how do you know which ones are proven to be effective?

Two programs are among the most studied and best documented parenting programs in existence. Both have been found to be effective in changing parental behaviour and improving child outcomes.

### **Triple P – The Positive Parenting Program**

<http://www1.triplep.net/>

Developed at the University of Queensland in Australia by Dr. Matthew Sanders, the basic goals of Triple P – The Positive Parenting Program are to have parents understand how to provide a safe and engaging environment in which their children can learn and grow.

The program is designed to teach strategies of “positive parenting,” that is, the use of constructive discipline with limit setting and consequences, and the use of praise, affection, encouragement, involvement and monitoring of activities.

One of the overall goals of Triple P is to help avoid the stigma often felt by stressed families, so Triple P was conceived as an intervention to prevent children's behavioural and mental health problems by “nipping them in the bud”.

The program can be delivered to parents one-on-one or in groups, at home or in a clinic. It offers parents the ability to make their own decisions around what kind of help they

need. Parents can pick up or download “tip sheets” on everyday parenting problems, or request short telephone consultations to handle particular problems with their children.

The program is widely advertised so that everyone can access it. For instance, in New Zealand a television program was developed in which the characters show typical child behaviour problems and then model appropriate parenting techniques to correct them.

There are, however, families who because of their own personal history and social situation may need more intensive assistance to help them learn parenting strategies that reduce the likelihood that their children will develop social, behavioural, or mental health disorders. These parents have found Triple P reduces their own mental health problems, such as depression or anxiety.

Triple-P has been tested over a period of 20 years with different ethnic groups and people from different socioeconomic backgrounds. Clinical trials are currently in progress looking at whether or not Triple-P is effective in children with special needs and children who already have behaviour problems. Studies have found it to be effective in changing parental behaviour and improving child outcomes. In 2005 the program was adopted by the Government of Manitoba as one of its strategies to improve child health.

The preceding is a summary of:

Sanders MR. *Triple P – Positive Parenting Program: A population approach to promoting competent parenting*. Australian e-Journal for the Advancement of Mental Health 2003, 2(3): 1-17.

### **The Incredible Years**

<http://www.incredibleyears.com/>

The Incredible Years, developed by Dr. Carolyn Webster-Stratton, is a targeted program aimed at reducing problem behaviours in children through child, parent, and teacher training.

The major goal of the Incredible Years is to reduce difficult behaviours in children by teaching them directly how to get along with others and how to understand and manage their own feelings.

Aggressive children often misunderstand other people’s intentions, reading threat and hostility into what are often just ordinary interactions. The Incredible Years helps children improve their social skills and learn to negotiate with others to solve problems.

Parents are taught to understand what motivates their children's behaviour and to respond with firm but loving limit setting. Some parents, because of their own life experience, tend to use harsh criticism and punishment to try to control their children but this has a cost – the relationship between parent and child is damaged and the bonds of affection and trust are broken down. This leads to further behaviour problems and a “vicious cycle” is set up. The Incredible Years helps to build positive parent-child relationships. In fact, one study of The Incredible Years showed that if mothers are not able to change their use of harsh parenting techniques, their child will not benefit from the program.

Studies of The Incredible Years have also found that those parents who had social and mental health problems at the beginning of the program became healthier themselves and more competent parents if they were able to fully participate in the parent training.

Teachers, too, are helped with child management skills for the classroom, so that children with behaviour problems are treated in a consistent fashion and learn what to expect from the important people in their lives. Another of the goals of The Incredible Years is to help children learn skills necessary for school success. For more information about school readiness go to [www.offordcentre.com/readiness](http://www.offordcentre.com/readiness).

The Incredible Years has been tested extensively with children who have different behaviour problem severity and with families from different ethnic and racial groups, and found to be effective in improving child behaviour, parenting skills and parent mental health, and behaviour management skills for teachers.

The preceding is a summary of:

Baydar N, Reid MJ, Webster-Stratton C. *The role of mental health factors and program engagement in the effectiveness of a preventive parenting program for Head Start mothers*. Child Development 2003, 74(5): 1433-1453.

Reid MJ, Webster-Stratton C, Beauchaine TP. *Parent training in Head Start: a comparison of program response among African American, Asian American, Caucasian, and Hispanic mothers*. Prevention Science 2001, 2(4): 209-227.

For a made-in-Canada approach to positive parenting, check out [COPE](#) (Community Parent Education Services) developed by researchers at the Offord Centre for Child Studies.

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The preceding is a summary of:

Law J, Garrett Z, Nye C. *Speech and language therapy interventions for children with primary speech and language delay or disorder*. The Cochrane Database of Systematic Reviews 2003, Issue 3. Art. No.: CD004110. DOI: 10.1002/14651858.CD004110.