

Evidence Based Parenting Programmes



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Importance of valuing and supporting positive parental influences

A wealth of theoretical knowledge and research evidence exists on the influence of parenting on children's outcomes both short and long term. Stemming from this is an increased policy and practice focus on evidence-based parenting interventions and a subsequent need to be able to determine not just what works, but how and why.

While pregnancy and infancy are vital stages in the creation of secure attachments and in a child's emotional, physical and social development, evidence has shown that a parent's influence extends well beyond this. A supportive home environment and strong parenting skills have been shown to have positive outcomes for educational attainment, well-being and achievements.

This publication lists the evidence based parenting programmes currently being delivered in Northern Ireland, supported by Child Development Interventions Coordinators. This list is not exhaustive and may change over time.

The vast and varied range of programmes available can be confusing, particularly for a parent trying to access a service.

What do we know about parenting programmes?

- All parents can at some stage benefit from parenting support programmes
- Early Intervention, both at age and stage of need, produces better and more long lasting outcomes for children, however later intervention can still be useful, particularly when targeting a specific issue
- For programmes to be successful they must have clearly stated aims and objectives with measurable outcomes
- Programmes should have a core structure that can be followed closely and implemented with fidelity by trained staff
- Programmes should have a strong evidence base with a clear mechanism of change
- Universal programmes work best for families with no or low identified risk; targeted programmes work best for those families identified as being at higher risk
- Parenting support programmes work best when they involve parallel sessions with parents, children and families.

A brief description of each programme is included along with details on the target audience, known outcomes and additional information for parents and professionals.

Families and Schools Together (FAST)

FAST was developed in the USA by Dr Lyn McDonald and comprises a series of after-school programmes which encourage parent involvement with their child and their school. In Northern Ireland the programme is aimed at age 3 to 8 years and delivered by Save the Children. The aims are to promote parental participation within schools and communities, reduce family stress and social isolation, and reduce risk factors in children.



Who is it for?

Age: Parents or carers of children aged 3 to 8 years

Classification: Universal

Need: Low and Moderate

Evidence base:

Four Randomised Controlled Trials (RCT) have been conducted on the FAST programme in the USA, with positive results. In the UK (2010), a mixed methods design was used to evaluate the FAST delivery in 15 areas across England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland. Results were consistent with the wider studies.

Outcomes included:

- Improvement in family cohesion
- Strengthened social networks
- Improved coping with life stresses
- Increased involvement of parents in child's education
- Strengthened relationships between parents and teachers
- Reduction in family conflict.



Family Links Nurturing Programme

This universal 10 week programme was developed by American child psychologist Dr Stephen J Bavolek researching families with significant relationship difficulties. The programme helps to build parent and child's relationships, confidence and skills through focusing on 4 areas: self-awareness, appropriate expectations, empathy and positive discipline. Parents are helped to address their own emotional needs before focusing on positive parenting practices. The UK version has been adapted from the original US high risk version for low risk families.

Who is it for?

Age: Parents or carers of children aged 9 months to 18 years

Classification: Universal and Targeted

Need: Low and Moderate



Evidence base:

The Family Links Programme in the UK is based upon the Nurturing Parents Programme, a strongly evidence based model developed in the USA. Given the differences in context between the UK and USA, and the rapidly changing needs of families, the programme has understandably gone through significant changes since its arrival in the UK. While qualitative research has shown positive impact on families, the programme has not yet built an established quantitative evidence base in the UK. Family Links are continuing to review the content and implementation of the programme, working to align it to the wider evidence base on 'what works' to support families.

Outcomes included:

- Improved child behaviour
- Improved parent's mental well-being
- Improved family relationships.



Family Nurse Partnership

Based on work by Professor David Olds at the University of Colorado, Family Nurse Partnership (FNP) is available to young mums to be expecting their first child. Mothers receive a visit from their family nurse on a weekly or fortnightly basis, until the child's 2nd birthday. Advice and support is provided on a range of topics including, personal health, environmental health, life course development, maternal role and support services.

Who is it for?

Age: Women aged 19 years and under expecting their first child

Classification: Selective Prevention

Need: Moderate

Evidence base:

Randomised Controlled Trials (RCT) have been conducted across the USA with significant positive outcomes. FNP is listed as a Level 1 Programme in the Graham Allen report and is one of only two interventions currently being delivered in the UK to receive a 4+ evidence rating from the Early Intervention Foundation (2016). Building Blocks, a more recent RCT carried out to consider effectiveness of the programme in England found that FNP did improve early child development and may also help protect children from serious injury, abuse and neglect through early identification of safeguarding risks with some small improvements in mothers' social support, relationship quality and self-efficacy.

Outcomes included:

- Parents coped better with pregnancy, labour and parenthood
- Reduction in smoking during pregnancy
- Higher breast feeding initiation rate than national rate
- Significant improvement in self-esteem linked to positive behaviour change in mothers
- Improvement in regular use of birth control and subsequent spacing out of future pregnancies
- Increased return to education and employment for parents.

The Incredible Years®

Developed by Dr Carolyn Webster-Stratton, Director of the Parenting Clinic at the University of Washington, in 1984. Incredible Years® aims to reduce behaviour problems and to promote problem solving skills, social competence and emotional regulation. Programmes are aimed at parents or teachers of children aged from birth to 12 years. The Incredible Years® series is a set of thirteen developmentally based training programmes for parents, children and teachers. This series includes an Autism and Speech and Language Delay programme and a 'Teacher' programme for day-care providers.

Who is it for?

Age: Parents, carers or teachers of children aged from birth to 12 years

Classification: Universal, Targeted and Specialist

Need: Moderate and High



Evidence base:

Core programmes have been evaluated globally by independent researchers using Randomised Controlled Trials (RCT), and have been shown to be highly effective. In the UK and Ireland, studies have been completed by Kings College London, Bangor University, and Trinity College Dublin amongst others. The Incredible Years® pre-school basic parent programme is listed as a Level 1 Programme in the Graham Allen report.

Early Intervention Foundation (EIF) ratings of the Incredible Years® programmes range between 3 or 4+. In the 2016 EIF report 'Foundations for life: What works to Support Parent Child Interaction in the Early Years' the Incredible Years® Preschool BASIC Programme is one of only two programmes that receives a 4+ rating and is the only one with a 4+ rating that help parents manage their children's behaviour.

Outcomes included:

- Reduction in anti-social behaviour and aggression
- Increased praising behaviour and positive affirmation by parents and teachers
- Positive change in emotional and behavioural difficulties
- Increase in pro-social behaviours and problem solving
- Improved
 - social competence
 - positive family communication
 - parent interaction with teachers and classroom
 - school readiness and engagement in school activities.

Mellow Parenting

The Mellow Parenting programmes were developed by a team of psychologists and social workers in Scotland, and are intensive parenting programmes for parents of children from birth to 4 years. The programmes use video feedback and other techniques to teach parenting skills and promote positive relationships in vulnerable and hard to reach families with complex needs. The core programme has various adaptations including Mellow Bumps, Mellow Babies & Mellow Dads to target specific groups.

Who is it for?

Age: Parents or carers of children aged from birth to 4 years

Classification: Targeted and Specialist

Need: High



Evidence base:

The Mellow Parenting programmes are based on theories of child development including social learning theory, attachment theory, behavioural theory and cognitive behavioural theory. The original programme was evaluated using a case-controlled cohort study, with positive outcomes. Mellow parenting has been shown to be particularly effective in engaging hard to reach families, with high levels of retention.

Outcomes included:

- Improved parent-child interaction
- Increased positive parenting skills
- Accelerated improvement in maternal well-being for mothers experiencing post-natal depression (Mellow Babies)
- Improved child behaviour.



Parents Plus

Developed in Dublin in 1998 by Dr John Sharry and Prof. Carol Fitzpatrick, the Parents Plus Children's programme aims to help parents to develop positive communication skills with their children, illustrating ways to encourage good social skills and tackle behaviour problems. The programme is appropriate for both universal and targeted provision and has a range of versions depending on age and circumstance. The Early Years, Children and Adolescent programme, Parenting When Separated and Working Things Out programmes are all part of the Parent Plus suite.

Who is it for?

Age: Parents or carers of children aged from 1 to 17 years

Classification: Universal and Targeted

Need: Low and Moderate



Evidence base:

The Parents Plus programmes are evidence-based and follow international best-practice guidelines as described by the National Institute for Clinical Excellence in the UK. The programme has been subject to a number of Research studies including four Randomised Control Trials (RCT). In addition, the programmes have been independently evaluated by the National Parenting Academy in the UK and have been awarded top ratings. A recent RCT conducted in primary schools across Ireland highlighted significant benefits for families who attend the Parents Plus courses, both post-treatment and importantly, at follow up.

Outcomes included:

- Reduced behavioural problems
- Reduced parental stress
- Stronger and more satisfying relationships between parent and child
- Increased positive behaviour
- Increased self-confidence and self-esteem in children
- Improved problem solving behaviour for parents and children.



Solihull Approach Parenting Group - Understanding Your Child's Behaviour

Family relationship training for all parents of children aged from birth to 18 years with low to moderate needs. Can be adapted for use with families with ASD/ADHD¹, fostering, adoptive carers and parents with children with disabilities. The programme aims to help parents reflect on their child's behaviour and their relationship with their child using the processes of containment, reciprocity and behaviour management.

Who is it for?

Age: Parents or carers of children aged from birth to 18 years

Classification: Universal and Targeted

Need: Low and Moderate



Evidence base:

The Solihull Approach Parenting Group is based on theories of child development, psychoanalytic theory and behaviourism. It is evidence informed and has had some small scale evaluations carried out. A 2016 evaluation showed that parents who attend Understanding Your Child's Behaviour groups for parents rate them positively with outcomes including feeling calmer and more confident, having a better relationship with their child, and enjoying parenting more.

Outcomes included:

- Significant reductions in mothers' levels of anxiety
- Improvements in child's behaviour.

¹ASD - Autism Spectrum Disorder

ADHD - Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder

Strengthening Families

The Strengthening Families programme was originally designed to reduce risk factors for children in families with a history of parental drug and alcohol abuse. The core aim is to improve the family environment by helping parents to develop behaviour management techniques and to understand the importance of rewards and positive attitudes to their children. The programme uses separate structured sessions for parents and children to allow both to work on parenting and life skills, followed by a joint parent-child session where both have the opportunity to practice their new skills through experiential exercises.

Who is it for?

Age: Parents or carers of children aged from 3 to 16 years

Classification: Universal and Targeted

Need: Low, Moderate and High



Evidence base:

The programme has been widely evaluated, both in the USA and globally as its implementation has spread. Results have been consistently positive across the evaluations, particularly when comparing the original Lutra programme with the revised Lifeline (UK) model.

Outcomes included:

- Delayed onset or long-term prevention of adolescent substance abuse
- Lowered levels of aggression
- Reduction in anti-social behaviours in young people
- Increased resistance to peer pressure
- Improved stress management skills in young people
- Development of positive family relationship and parent/child communication skills
- Increased parental confidence and skills
- Increased ability of parents/caregivers to set appropriate limits and show affection and support to their children.



Odyssey Parenting Your Teen

Odyssey Parenting Your Teen was created by Parenting NI and was developed to improve communication and relationships between parents and their teenagers. This programme covers a range of themes including teen development, self-esteem, rules and consequences, dealing with conflict and problem solving. The programme promotes Authoritative Parenting, the style of parenting which has proven to be most effective.

Who is it for?

Age: Parents or carers of teenagers

Classification: Universal

Need: Low



Evidence base:

The Odyssey Parenting Your Teen programme has been independently verified by Queen's University Belfast which concluded that there was convincing evidence of the effectiveness of this programme. The results indicate that the intervention can bring about positive changes in parental mental health and stress. The benefits are not restricted to just the parents. The results indicate that the programme can enhance family life by improving parent adolescent communication and lowering levels of distress.

Outcomes included:

This programme has been found to improve outcomes for parents, their teenage children and the family as a whole.

- Enhanced parental wellbeing
- Reduced parental stress
- Improved communication between parents and their teenagers.



Contact details for Child Development Interventions Coordinators (CDIC)

For further information on programmes please contact your local CDIC.

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