

Parent Training

Parents are a critical factor in the social development of children (Alvarado and Kumpfer 2000; Conger and Simons 1997). A plethora of studies have produced empirical findings that indicate parental behavior can either increase or decrease an adolescent's risk for delinquency and other problem behaviors (Elliot, Huizinga, and Menard 1989; Loeber and Stouthamer-Loeber 1986; Patterson et al. 1992; Sampson and Laub 1993; Simons et al. 1998; Simons, Chao, and Conger 2001). For instance, volumes of research indicate that supportive parent-child relationships, positive discipline methods, close monitoring and supervision, parental advocacy for their children, and parental pursuit of needed information and support (Huizinga, Loeber, and Thornberry 1995; Bry 1996; Alvarado and Kumpfer 2000) consistently buffer youth against problem behaviors. In addition, research has also revealed that children are at risk of developing antisocial behaviors when they are exposed to ineffective parenting behaviors such as poor supervision, rejection, or harsh and inconsistent discipline. Specifically, research indicates that antisocial behavior of parents (Slavin and Rainer 1990); unsupportive parents (Conger and Simons 1997; Sampson and Laub 1993; Gottfredson and Hirschi 1990); physical and emotional abuse (Doerner 1987); parent-child involvement, parental supervision, and parental rejection (Loeber and Stouthamer-Loeber 1986; Cernkovich and Giordano 1987); and parental monitoring, parenting techniques, and caretaker discipline toward children (Steinberg 1990; Snyder and Patterson 1987) have all been found to influence delinquent behavior.

This research suggests that improving fundamental parenting practices should reduce problem behaviors. Today there are several major categories of interventions designed to improve parenting practices and thus prevent future problem behaviors. These programs include behavioral parent training, parent education, parent support groups, in-home parent education or parent aid, and parent involvement in youth groups. This section generically labels all of these "parent-training programs."

Theoretical Foundation

Parents can increase the probability of delinquency and other problem behaviors among their children because they serve as the primary socialization context for children (Simons et al. 1998; Patterson, Reid, and Dishion 1992). The theoretical foundation for this relationship is generally grounded in theories of social control positing that delinquent acts are more likely to occur when an individual's bond to society is weak or broken (Hirschi 1969). Under this perspective, the family acts as a socializing agent by introducing and endearing children to conventional norms and values. The theory argues that a strong

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affectionate tie between child and parent is one of the fundamental means for establishing this societal bond and thus insulating adolescents from delinquency and other problem behaviors (Brook, Whiteman, Finch, and Cohen 1998).

Unfortunately, poor family functioning or nontraditional family structures can inhibit the development of or decrease parental attachment and thus break the bond with society, separating individuals from the internal controls that discourage criminal behavior. Gottfredson and Hirschi (1990) argue that as a result of inept parenting, some adolescents tend to be impulsive, defiant, physical, and risk-taking (Stewart et al. 2002; Conger, Patterson, and Ge 1995). Such youth are attracted more strongly to delinquent acts than those who have been socialized to possess strong internal controls. However, ineffective parenting is seen as a result of two factors (Thornberry 1987; Simons, Chao, and Conger 2001). First, parents and children tend to be similar in their temperament, personality, and cognitive abilities (Plomin, Chipuer, Loehlin 1990). Thus, there is a tendency for impulsive, aggressive children to have parents who also possess these characteristics, and these characteristics tend to interfere with effective parenting. Second, research indicates that parent-child interaction is a reciprocal process. In other words, not only does ineffective parenting increase the probability of child conduct disorders, but also hostile, obstinate child behavior often elicits negative parenting behavior – resulting in a reduction in effective parenting (Patterson, Reid, and Dishion 1992). Thus the personal characteristics of the parents combine with the difficult behavior of the child to create a volatile mix of antagonistic relationships.

Consequently, it is imperative that delinquency prevention programs reinforce the parent-child bond as a means of preventing delinquent behavior. One way of reinforcing the parent-child relationship is to decrease risk factors and increase protective factors for delinquent behavior through parent training and family strengthening programs. These programs address important family protective factors such as parental supervision, attachment to parents, and consistency of discipline (Huizinga, Loeber, and Thornberry 1995). They also address some of the most important family risk factors such as poor supervision, excessive family conflict, family isolation, sibling drug use, and poor socialization (Kumpfer and Alvarado 1995).

Types of Parenting Training

Parent-training programs concentrate on teaching parents and prospective parents the use of effective management skills. This highly structured approach generally includes parents only, in small groups led by a skilled trainer or clinician. Programs are designed to help parents learn to recognize both prosocial and antisocial behaviors, employ social learning techniques (e.g., positive reinforcement, ignoring, distraction, punishment), and improve family problem-solving skills. Parent training can be beneficial even during pregnancy and early childhood, since parenting skills learned early can have positive effects as the child matures (Howell 1995).

Parent-training sessions can occur in diverse settings (e.g., schools, community centers, churches, the workplace, or even at home with self-instructional programs) and under various types of approaches. Kumpfer (1999) outlines several of these approaches, including the following:

- Behavioral parenting training is structured, delivered by a trained professional, and lasts for 8 to 14 sessions of 1 to 2 hours each. A curriculum and instructional aids (e.g., manuals, guidebooks, handouts, videotapes) are used. Positive reinforcement skills are taught and parents learn to decrease inappropriate punitive behaviors and chastisements.

- Parent education programs are usually designed to reach a broader audience of families who are not necessarily severely dysfunctional, but who may be at risk. Parent education programs raise awareness of good parenting practices and better ways to discipline children. They also help parents learn how to determine if a child is abusing drugs or alcohol and to recognize other warning signs of delinquent behavior. Parent education materials may include videotapes, television programs, and brochures, feature articles in newspapers and magazines, and other written information. In addition to general media information, schools, workplaces, churches, and community organizations can offer parent education information.
- Parent action/parent support groups are grassroots organizations that have gained in popularity in the past 2 decades. Some are national organizations with local chapters; others are ad hoc groups of neighborhood parents.

Outcome Evidence

There has been a great amount of evaluation research that has examined the effectiveness of different types of parent-training programs on numerous parent- and child-related behavioral outcomes.

Nurse Family Partnership (NFP) provides low-income, first-time mothers of any age with home-visitation services from public health nurses. The nurses work intensively with the mothers to improve maternal, prenatal, and early childhood health and well-being, with the expectation that this intervention will help achieve long-term improvements in the lives of at-risk families. A 12-year follow-up evaluation found that children whose parents had participated in NFP were significantly less likely to have used cigarettes, alcohol, or marijuana; reported fewer internalizing problems; and had better reading and math achievement tests scores in grades 1 through 6 compared with children in the control group (Kitzman et al. 2010). At the 15-year follow-up, there were significantly fewer child maltreatment reports involving the mother as the perpetrator, but there was no significant impact on the incidences of domestic violence (Eckenrode et al. 2000).

The Triple P-Positive Parenting Program is a community-based comprehensive parent-training program with the purpose of reducing child maltreatment and children's behavioral problems. It is built upon a public health approach and as such was designed to treat large populations. The five core principles taught to parents are: 1) ensure a safe and engaging environment; 2) promote a positive learning environment; 3) use assertive discipline; 4) maintain reasonable expectations; and 5) take care of oneself as a parent. An evaluation by Prinz and colleagues (2009) found that counties which had receive the Triple P System had a large reductions in child maltreatment, including substantiated child maltreatment, out-of-home child placements, and hospitalizations or emergency room visits for child maltreatment injuries.

Another parent-directed program is The Incredible Years Training Series, which includes the School-Age BASIC Training Program and ADVANCE Parent Training Program. The Incredible Years Training Series consists of programs that address family management problems, lack of commitment to school, early and persistent antisocial behavior, and family conflict. There are three separate *Basic* programs for parents of toddlers (1-3 years), preschoolers (3-5 years), and school-age children (6-12 years) focused on developmentally appropriate parenting strategies known to promote children's social and academic competence and emotional regulation, and also to reduce behavior problems. Core topic areas include parents learning effective play interaction skills and ways to strengthen their relationship with children; academic, persistence, social, and emotion coaching skills; using praise and incentives

effectively; setting up predictable routines and schedules; providing adequate monitoring and safety-proofing children's homes; using limit-setting and proactive discipline strategies effectively to handle misbehavior; and teaching children to solve problems. The *Advanced* program emphasizes parent interpersonal skills such as effective communication skills, anger management, solving problems between adults, ways to give and get support, and family meetings. This is offered to groups of parents who have completed the *Basic* program. Evaluations of The Incredible Years found significant reductions in mothers' negative parenting and children's negative behavior (Webster-Stratton, Reid, and Hammond 2004); significant improvements in children's social competence (Webster-Stratton, Reid, and Hammond 2004; Miller Brotman et al. 2005); and significant improvement in school readiness (Webster-Stratton, Reid, and Stoolmiller 2008).

In addition to the program evaluations, there have been several meta-analyses that have synthesized the results across numerous individual studies of parent-training programs (Piquero et al. 2009; Lundahl, Nimer, and Parson 2006). The meta-analyses generally found moderate effect sizes when looking at outcomes such as abuse, childrearing skills, and problem behaviors. Overall, there is strong support in the research literature for the effectiveness of parent-training programs.

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