

On the right track

Learning from investment in Prevention
and Early Intervention in Ireland

Parenting



ON THE
RIGHT
TRACK

Produced by



About this summary

This summary outlines learning from programmes which aimed to improve parenting outcomes. Programmes were delivered under the Prevention & Early Intervention Initiative. This summary identifies some of the features of effective programmes which are transferable to wider services dealing with children and young people. Key messages are based on findings from independent evaluations, but also draw from CES's experience of working with government and service providers in implementing a range of programmes and services for children and young people.

The final report **On the right track: Parenting (2016)** and this summary will be of interest to policy makers, service commissioners and providers, agencies and organisations involved in the delivery of services which work with parents to improve outcomes for children and young people.

To read all of the reports produced in the **On the right track** series, visit www.effectiveservices.org

On The Right Track

Parenting

From 2004 to 2016, The Atlantic Philanthropies together with government and other organisations invested in 52 programmes and services aimed at improving outcomes for children across the island of Ireland. These programmes used prevention and early intervention approaches in various areas of children's lives, including learning, behaviour, health and development, parenting and inclusion. This investment was known as the Prevention and Early Intervention Initiative.

Organisations receiving funding under the initiative were required to evaluate the programmes they provided. Since 2008, CES has liaised with organisations delivering the programmes, to summarise learning from the experience of implementing individual programmes. Individual evaluations from each programme were used to inform a series of initial reports in six outcome areas which CES published in 2012 and 2013. This summary is based on an updated report produced by CES in 2016, which now includes findings from evaluations of fifteen programmes which supported parenting.

Learning from the initiative has already been used to inform the design and delivery of new programmes in Ireland and Northern Ireland, including the Area Based Childhood (ABC) Programme, an initiative introduced by the Irish Government in 2013 which aims to improve outcomes for children living in disadvantaged areas and the Early Intervention Transformation Programme, an Executive Office programme which aims to transform mainstream services in Northern Ireland.

Introduction

When commissioning services

There is no one approach that will meet the needs of all parents. Programmes and services should be selected in terms of how they can fit with the needs of parents, their children's stage of development and the most appropriate format for delivery.

Children and their parents benefit when services work together. Service providers should work together to reduce duplication and engage parents. Good communication and referral pathways help parents access the services they need in a co-ordinated and timely way.

Programme evaluations should include a cost effective element. This should reflect the true costs of delivering a service, including training, recruitment, resources and costs of ongoing delivery.

When implementing services

It is important to allow enough time for consultation with communities and stakeholders, recruitment, training and supporting staff and monitoring service delivery. It can take two to four years to develop, deliver and evaluate a parenting programme.

Practitioners need a variety of skills in their work with parents. They need good facilitation skills when they work with parents in group settings, and should have good local knowledge of other services and providers. This requires access to ongoing training and support.

Key Messages

Home visiting services and strategies are successful where practitioners develop good relationships with parents. Practitioners need to develop trust and negotiate the timing and frequency of visits with parents, and should be supportive and non-judgemental.

When engaging with parents

Providers should use a range of approaches to identify parents and encourage their participation. Parenting programmes, particularly those aimed at families experiencing multiple difficulties report relatively low participation and high dropout rates. Experiencing family stress, mental health difficulties and financial difficulties can affect how parents engage with services and programmes.

Parents need different supports and services as their children grow older. Children go through different stages of development both physically and emotionally, and the role of parents changes over time.

Parents experiencing particular difficulties with their mental health, or high levels of stress, require longer term, multidimensional and co-ordinated intervention. This should involve services which address those difficulties and which work directly with both parents and children.

“It made me more aware of what was going on for a child. It just makes you more aware of what the child wants and maybe that is why the child gets angry and aggressive. By the time I left, it was like I was getting a new child going home.” Mother of 6 year old girl

Parents play a critical role in influencing their children's lives, both before and after they are born. The quality of the parent child relationship is more important for children's development than family income or structure. Investing in programmes and services to support parents leads to improvements in the wellbeing of their children, and will reduce potential costs of addressing child behaviour difficulties at a later stage.

Parenting and the relationship that parents have with their children does not occur in a vacuum. A number of risk factors can have an impact on parents behaviour with their children. They include family stress, mental health difficulties and financial difficulties. While these challenges are difficult to overcome, studies show that supporting parents to develop positive parenting skills reduces these risk factors. For example, parenting programmes can decrease parental stress and improve parents' ability to cope if their children experience behavioural difficulties. Services can respond to the needs of children and parents at an early stage when providers work together and develop good pathways of referral.

Parenting – invest now or pay later?

“You could approach them, you could ask them questions; they were very helpful. They were very approachable and they were very good with the kids.”
Mother of 7 year old

Programmes delivered under the Prevention and Early Intervention Initiative included international programmes with an existing evidence base, some of which were adapted for delivery in particular communities. Programmes which were developed locally drawing on evidence of 'what works' were also delivered.

They included both universal and targeted programmes, such as parenting programmes, family support programmes, classroom management training for teachers and mentoring programmes for young people. Programmes were mostly delivered in areas experiencing social disadvantage. Five of the programmes worked primarily with parents and nine worked with parents to supplement the work that they were doing with children. Some parents were motivated and encouraged to attend while others were referred by professionals. Programmes used different approaches, including group work and one to one work with parents.

Eleven of the programmes evaluated changes in parenting outcomes using Randomised Controlled Trials (RCTs) where people are randomly selected to either receive an intervention or be part of a control group who do not. Two were evaluated using quasi-experimental approaches which compare the outcomes of people who receive an intervention to a group who do not; assignment to the intervention and control group is not random. The remaining two programmes were evaluated using non-experimental designs which incorporate a range of quantitative, qualitative or mixed methods approaches.

What programmes were delivered to support parents?

"I'm sorry its ending, it has been fantastic to have this extra support over three years. [My child] will really miss going." Parent

In general, programmes were shown to have a positive impact on parents, by improving parents' knowledge and skills, reducing parental stress and encouraging parents in different aspects of their children's development such as literacy and their attitudes towards diversity.

“The Family Visitor was easy to talk to and very kind, it was great to have visits in my own home, face-to-face to ask any questions.” Parent

Of the fifteen programmes delivered and evaluated under the Prevention and Early Intervention Initiative to support parents, eight evaluations demonstrated a significant improvement and five demonstrated positive trends. One programme evaluation reported mixed findings and one programme was discontinued following negative findings.

Findings from the evaluations suggest that programmes which support parents include the following five features:

- They are accessible to parents, in terms of their location, timing and length of sessions
- They use a number of approaches during sessions to keep parents engaged throughout the programme
- They provide training and ongoing support for practitioners to develop their skills and good, trusting relationships with parents
- They make good connections with other services and providers that parents may need to access
- They are flexible in how they respond to the needs of parents as their children grow older.

Five features of effective programmes

The evaluations provide useful insights for service providers, commissioners and practitioners involved in planning and delivering programmes and services to support parents.

1. Providers used a number of techniques to recruit parents, and to engage them during and between sessions. They consulted with parents in planning the location, timing and length of the sessions. Practitioners used a variety of techniques during the sessions, including varying the pace of delivery, and encouraging parents to lead the discussions. Sessions included video clips, tip sheets and practical resources that parents could use. Parents benefited from the experience of learning from others in group settings, which required practitioners with strong facilitation skills.

2. Activities such as home visiting can be challenging to organise. This activity requires confident, skilled practitioners who can engage with parents and who have access to support from their organisation. Time was also needed to manage the logistics of home visiting activities.

3. Parenting programmes were enhanced by additional interventions which addressed child behavioural problems. This was particularly the case where the child experienced a diagnosed difficulty, such as Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD). The involvement of children in some programmes also helped to encourage attendance at sessions.

4. Extensive training was required to equip staff to deal effectively with factors and influences outside of the programme content. Programmes worked well where practitioners had appropriate knowledge of support services, referral pathways and other options available to families.

5. Providers highlighted the importance of targeting particular parents and following up with those who dropped out of the programme. Feedback was useful in making changes to the timing and location of activities, along with planning outreach. The need for strategies which encourage greater engagement with fathers also emerged from some programmes.

6. It can take up to four years to develop, run and evaluate a parenting programme. Providers highlighted the time and effort needed to recruit and train staff and to identify participants. Time was also needed to adapt programmes and consult with communities and stakeholders to meet local needs. This is in line with research about effective implementation which indicates that the establishment, implementation and evaluation of a parenting service can take from two to four years.

What can we learn from the programmes which were implemented?

“Having someone independent or impartial who can be asked for advice – I got reassurance, ideas from my visitor, someone who could problem solve with me.” Parent


The following table provides an overview of the programmes evaluated & the changes reported in parenting outcomes in the evaluations. While the evaluation studies used a range of methods, this table shows the main evaluation approach relevant to this particular outcome area.


More details about the findings within individual evaluations are available in the longer report on Parenting. The On the right track series is available on the CES website www.effectiveservices.org


	Who did the programme work with?	Age Range	Setting	Programme Duration	Change in Parenting Outcome	Main Evaluation Approach
The Parent Child Psychological Support Programme youngballymun	Parents in the catchment area	0 to 18 months	Community	7 x 30-60 minute sessions from birth to 18 months	Mixed findings	Quasi-Experimental
Growing Child Programme Lifestart	Parents in the catchment area	0 to 5	Home	Monthly home visits from birth to 5 years	Significant Improvement	Randomised Controlled Trial
Triple P Parenting Programme Midlands Area Parenting Partnership	Parents in the catchment area	0 to 7	Community	Various lengths & intensity depending on need	Significant Improvement	Quasi-Experimental
Preparing For Life Northside Partnership	Parents of children in a disadvantaged area	0 to 5	Home	Monthly home visits & other supports from pregnancy to 5 years	Significant Improvement	Randomised Controlled Trial
Eager & Able to Learn Early Years	Children, families & practitioners in participating centres	2 to 3	Early Years Settings	8 to 9 months with 3 home visits with parents	Positive Trend	Non-Experimental
CDI Early Years Childhood Development Initiative (CDI)	Children & their families in a disadvantaged area	2 to 5	Early Years Settings	Various supports over 2 years	Positive Trend	Randomised Controlled Trial
Media Initiative for Children: Respecting Difference Early Years	Children, their parents & practitioners	3 to 5	Early Years Settings	1 x preschool year	Positive Trend	Randomised Controlled Trial
Incredible Years Parent Training Programme Archways	Parents of children with emotional & behavioural difficulties	3 to 7	Community	2-2.5 hrs per week over 12-14 weeks	Significant Improvement	Randomised Controlled Trial
Incredible Years Parent & Child Training for Children with ADHD Archways	Children with symptoms of ADHD & their parents	3 to 7	Community	Parents: 20 x 2 hr sessions Children: 18 x 2 hr sessions	Significant Improvement	Randomised Controlled Trial
Suite of Incredible Years Programmes youngballymun	Whole school approach with children, their parents & teachers	3 to 12	School	Delivered throughout the school year	Significant Improvement	Non-Experimental
Ready to Learn Barnardo's NI	All children in participating classes & their parents	4 to 8	School	3 x 1hr weekly sessions after school over 3 school years	Positive Trend	Randomised Controlled Trial
Doodle Den Childhood Development Initiative (CDI)	Children & their families in participating schools	5 to 6	School	6 x parent sessions, 3 x family sessions	Positive Trend	Randomised Controlled Trial
Mate Tricks Childhood Development Initiative (CDI)	Children referred to the programme	9 to 10	Community	6 x parent sessions, 3 x family sessions	Negative impact	Randomised Controlled Trial
Odyssey Parenting Your Teen Parenting NI	Parents self-referred to the programme	11 to 18	Community	2 hrs per week for 8 weeks	Significant Improvement	Randomised Controlled Trial
Functional Family Therapy Archways	Young people with behavioural problems & their families	11 to 18	Community	16-30 sessions depending on need	Significant Improvement	Randomised Controlled Trial


Changes in parenting outcomes are presented as follows:





 **Significant Improvement**, if the evaluations reported a statistically significant improvement on one or more measures of parenting

 **Mixed findings**, if there were some positive & some mixed effects for measures of parenting

 **Positive Trend**, if there was a positive result on one or more subscales of measures of parenting used, or improvements shown but not reaching statistical significance

 **No Difference**, if there were no statistically significant effects observed for measures of parenting

 **Negative impact**, if there were one or more significant negative effects on one or more measures of parenting

-  Home
-  Early Years Settings
-  School
-  Community

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