

## A Review of Parent Training Programs

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Although the style of parenting may vary from culture to culture, it is recognized as one of the most challenging yet rewarding vocations in life. Starting from infancy, parents play vital roles in their children's lives. Even though the type and extent of children's needs change over time, the presence of parents and their roles continue to influence their children's lives significantly. Despite their vital place and function in their children's lives, however, no formal training or education is required to become parents. This is a rather ironic problem especially because parents inevitably experience doubts about their parenting ability during the course of raising their children.

During the latter part of the last century, the importance of parenting and its challenges have led to the development of numerous programs designed to improve parenting skills. Particularly in counseling and psychology, there has been a wide acceptance that parents have the ability to facilitate change in their children's behaviors. Presently, not only are there many parent training programs aimed at guiding parents to deal with difficult behaviors, but also these programs have been investigated for efficacy and applicability to a variety of settings and diverse problem areas.

Furthermore, the availability of an abundant number of parent training studies has resulted in meta-analysis reports, synthesizing all of the relevant results from many years of individual studies of parent training (Kaminski, Valle, Filene, & Boyle, 2008; Reyno & McGrath, 2006). Consequently, today, parents and professionals are better informed about how to respond to the challenging behaviors of children such as aggression, noncompliance, hyperactivity, and destructive behaviors. The purpose of this study, therefore, is to review a select number of the empirically supported parent training programs and their efficacy. The overarching goal is to consider the application of these programs for Christian parents.

### *Parent Training Programs*

This section reviews representative parent training programs that are recognized as “empirically supported” or “evidence-based.” First, in order to be considered as “empirically supported,” the study must provide detailed procedures and measured outcomes. Secondly, it must also include randomly selected and controlled sample groups that compare the outcomes of the training programs in the body of literature. Third, the study must show short- and long-term effects and have a published manual for the training program (Rojas-Flores, Lowe, Herrera, 2006). When these criteria are met, a parent training program can then be recognized as being “empirically supported.” There are several parent training programs that have been recognized as “empirically supported.” Here below is a brief overview of parent training programs based on a body of literature obtained through various search programs in Korea.

### *The Incredible Years*

The *Incredible Years* programs were developed by Webster-Stratton for prevention and treatment of young children with conduct problems. They are developed to train three distinctive target populations: parents, teachers, and children. Their parent training programs are divided into several parts based on the children’s age, training levels, and specific focus, that is, education. Among them, one of the most frequently used programs is the *Incredible Years* BASIC Parent Training Program for ages two to seven years old. In addition, there are the *Incredible Years* School-Age BASIC Parent Training Programs for five to twelve year olds, the *Incredible Years* ADVANCE Parent Training Program for four to ten year olds, and the *Incredible Years* EDUCATION Parent Training Program that supplement either the childhood or the school-age BASIC program.

The *Incredible Years* programs utilize group discussion, videotaped vignettes for modeling, role-play, and rehearsal intervention techniques. In the BASIC parent training program, the targeted parenting skills include how to play with children, give praises and rewards, set limits, and provide appropriate discipline. The ADVANCED program focuses on improving the parents’ interpersonal skills through problem solving, anger management, communication, depression control, and utilization of social support (Webster-Stratton, 2000).

### *Parent-Child Interaction Therapy (PCIT)*

Parent-Child Interaction Therapy (PCIT) was developed by Eyberg for young children (two to seven years old) with behavioral problems. PCIT is based on attachment and social learning theories and is com-

posed of two phases. The first phase consists of child-directed interaction, and the second phase deals with parent-directed interaction. In this program, parents first learn to play with their child using a child-centered approach that is designed to promote a positive parent-child relationship by giving praises and verbal feedback as well as by ignoring misbehaviors. When the parents in training are able to demonstrate adequate levels of parenting skills during the first phase, then they are trained to teach their child to follow their directions by using a “time-out” method. Finally, the skills that parents acquire from their therapist are to be practiced at home before coming to the next coaching session. PCIT is offered in a short-term, individual parent-child dyad format (Hembree-Kigin & McNeil, 1995).

### *Parent Management Training (PMT)*

Parent Management Training (PMT) was developed by Kazdin to help children between two to fourteen years of age. Similar to PCIT, PMT focuses on the parent-child interactions and utilizes social learning theory to alter maladaptive parent-child interactions in order to decrease the child’s behavioral problems. Through the therapist’s instructions, modeling, and coaching to practice the implementation of new behaviors, parents are taught how to define, observe, and record their child’s problem behaviors. Parents learn concepts such as positive reinforcements and punishment. Parents also learn to apply these concepts to reinforce, to ignore, and to punish according to the child’s behavior. Parents usually begin with simple problems and expand to the most severe problems in application of the parenting skills. PMT can be offered in both individual and group formats (Feldman & Kazin, 1995; Kazin, 2007).

### *Behavioral Parent Training*

The aforementioned parent training programs appear to have the following similarities. First, all three programs are designed to target children’s behavioral problems or disorders such as attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder, conduct disorder, oppositional defiant disorder, and the less severe levels of aggressive and disruptive behaviors. Second, all of the programs include behavioral treatment components; parents learn how to increase their child’s adaptive behaviors and decrease or extinguish the maladaptive behaviors by using behavioral principles such as selective attention and positive reinforcement. Third, these empirically supported parent training programs tend to focus on the child’s externalized behavioral problems and utilize behavioral techniques.

There are also other parent training programs that utilize behavioral theory and treatment techniques and therefore could be grouped together under the umbrella of behavioral parent training. One of the most well-known examples is *Defiant Children* by Barkley (1997), which provides an assessment and parent training manual for clinicians and a separate self-help workbook for parents. In fact, Maughan, Christiansen, Jenson, Olympia, & Clark's study (2005) was able to identify 79 outcome studies of behavioral parent training published between 1966 and 2001 for their meta-analysis. One of the evaluative criteria they used was whether or not a particular behavioral treatment procedure included "the training of parents/caregivers in the use of reinforcement and/or time-out and one additional behavioral procedure (i.e., differential attention, precision requests, planning ignoring, response cost, point systems, natural consequences, praise, or contracts)." Using Maughan, Christiansen, Jenson, Olympia, & Clark's criteria, therefore, the aforementioned parent training programs can also be considered as behavioral parent training.

## Efficacy of Parent Training Programs

### *Children's Behavioral Problems*

Kaminski, Valle, Filene, & Boyle (2008) reviews 77 parent training programs (published from 1990 through 2002) for young children and identified components that make parent training programs effective. Higher effects are reported to be associated with enhancement in the following areas: positive parent-child interaction, emotional communication skills, proper use of time-out, and consistency in parenting. In addition, requiring parents to practice new skills with their child during parent training sessions is also reportedly associated with resulting in a larger positive effect in parent training programs. In 1999, Dore & Lee, after reviewing 14 studies that analyzes the results of parent training programs for children with behavioral problems, recommended parent training programs to include cognitive and affective dimensions in order to supplement behavioral techniques.

However, the current meta-analysis done by Kaminski, Valle, Filene, & Boyle observes that there is only a small effect related to cognitive aspects such as teaching parents skills to solve problems and to promote the child's cognitive, academic, or social skills. In addition, there is no indication of any effect related to the affective component of parent training, perhaps due to the lack of outcome studies that incorporate the affective dimension of the parent training programs. The overall weighted effect size of the 77 parent training outcome studies was .34. This indicates that there is a significant mean difference between parents

who participated in the parent training program and the other comparison group. Maughan, Christiansen, Jenson, Olympia, & Clark (2005) also reports the effect size of .30 for the between-subjects designs; .68 for the within-subjects designs; and .54 (using ITSACORR method) for the behavioral parent training programs mentioned above. These effect sizes, according to Cohen's classification, are considered to be in the small to moderate range.

A meta-analysis of 63 studies of parent training programs (published from 1974 through 2003) by Lundahl, Risser, & Lovejoy (2006) also reveals the same small to moderate range of effect size immediately following the treatment (.42-.53). According to this study, there is no significant difference between behavioral and non-behavioral parent training programs. Significantly, this study discovered that parent training was least effective for families in economically disadvantaged conditions (effect size .24 for children's behavior change;  $Q_b=7.88$ ,  $p<.01$ ). For the economically disadvantaged parents, the individual parent training methodology was more effective than any other delivery method.

In general, however, how the parent training was delivered (i.e., group, individual, self-directed, or any combination among them) did not make any significant difference ( $p<.05$ ). Interestingly, parent training programs that included only parents as the sole recipient of treatment showed greater changes than those offering an additional separate treatment for the child or a multisystemic approach. A meta-analysis by Reyno & McGrath (2006) also found that family income (large effect), maternal psychopathology (moderate effect), and maternal depression (small effect) are the predictors of parent training efficacy.

In Valdez, Carlson, & Zanger's study (2005), a meta-analysis was performed to examine the efficacy of parent training and family interventions for children's behavioral changes in their schools. Among the 19 reviewed parent training and five family interventions, one parent training (PMT plus problem-solving) and one family intervention (Social Learning Family Therapy: SLFT) were proven to be effective in promoting behavioral changes in schools, while several others were considered to be probably effective or promising. They noted that all of the effective parent-training programs and family intervention programs actually improved parent-child or family relationships in addition to improving the child's targeted behavior and school functioning.

Overall, parent training programs have repeatedly demonstrated their effectiveness in addressing children's behavioral problems. However, there is still room for further study to evaluate and increase program effectiveness. For instance, a study done by Granic, O'Hara, Pepler, & Lewis (2007) shows how the nature of parent-child interaction can change—an important component of parent training programs' effec-

tiveness—in parent training programs. Parent-child emotional flexibility, ability to repair conflicts, and ability to move away from negative interactions toward adapting mutually positive interaction patterns were found to be associated with improvements in children's externalizing behaviors. This study provides a more detailed understanding of parent-child interactions than the previous parent training studies.

### *Child Abuse*

Parent training programs were also reviewed for their prevention of child abuse. The meta-analysis from 17 studies done by Lundahl, Nimer, & Parsons (2006) shows that parent training effectively reduces the risk of physical or verbal abuse of children and child neglect. Once parents complete parent training programs successfully, they are more likely to develop authoritative as opposed to authoritarian parenting attitudes and are less likely to view corporal punishment as an effective long-term discipline method. The parent training programs seem to promote parental emotional well-being and positive parenting skills, while reducing child abuse.

The authors also discuss the positive impact of home visits and training sessions in both the office and the home settings. Offering individual training sessions promoted positive parenting skills more effectively than offering only the group training sessions. In addition, this study recommends combining the use of behavioral and non-behavioral components together in parent training programs. The behavioral methods were reported to be more effective in promoting positive child-rearing practices, while the non-behavioral methods were more effective in promoting authoritative parenting beliefs and attitudes. The effect sizes immediately following the parent training were reported to be in the moderate range (.45 - .60). Thus, this study indicates that parent training programs can be effective in reducing child abuse and neglect.

### *Specialized Parent Group Studies*

There are numerous outcome studies that measure the effectiveness of parent training programs in addition to the above described areas. The following are examples of individual studies examining the effectiveness of parent training programs targeting specific parent groups: Systemic Training for Effective Parenting (STEP; Nystul, 1982); Adlerian parent training for African American parents (Farooq, Jefferson, & Fleming, 2007); and *Incredible Years* for adoptive parents (Henderson & Sargent, 2005). Additionally, there are also parent training programs that examine developmentally disabled infants (Minor, Minor, & Williams, 1983), children's social skills improvement (DeRosier & Gil-

liom, 2007), generalization effects to other settings (Drugli & Larsson, 2006), and children's internalizing problems (Cartwright-Hatton, Phil, McNally, White, & Verduyn, 2005). In general, these parent training studies demonstrate meaningful significance, but many more studies should be made to establish clearer efficacy of each designated parent training program.

### **Spirituality and Diversity in Parent Training Programs**

There are only a very limited number of empirically supported parent training programs that address spirituality and/or diversity. Forehand & Kotchick's study (1996) raises a concern for the lack of cultural consideration in developing parent training programs. Rojas-Flores, Lowe, & Herrera (2006) suggests seven ways to incorporate cultural values in parent training programs, placing emphasis on the cultural values throughout the parenting intervention. They are:

- 1) Inquire about cultural values from the inception of parenting intervention.
- 2) Assist and teach parents to understand behavioral principles in a culturally sensitive way.
- 3) Implement developmental sensitivity.
- 4) Provide parents with additional support and practical assistance to address specific family/child stressors.
- 5) Follow an intervention protocol/manual to ensure that all the essential components of a sequenced parenting skill building techniques are fully delivered.
- 6) Train and supervise interventionists/paraprofessionals.
- 7) Foster networking and giving support sources.

On the one hand, this paper was unable to locate the studies that followed Rojas-Flores, Lowe, & Herrera's recommendations; still, their recommendations appear to be worthy of clinicians' notice especially if they are working with parents from diverse religious, racial, and ethnic groups. On the other hand, there does appear to be a limited number of studies examining the effectiveness of individual parent training programs for the diverse parent groups with or without adaptation to the original program. An Adlerian parent training program using videos was found to be effective for African American parents to become more empathetic toward their child and to have authoritative parenting attitudes (Farooq, Jefferson, & Fleming, 2007).

In addition, an outcome study of a culturally adapted Parent Management Training (PMT) for Latino parents supports both the feasibility of the program to a larger Latino context. This study also demonstrates efficacy in positive parenting behaviors and in youth's behaviors (Martinez & Eddy, 2005). Parent-Child Interaction Therapy (PCIT) is also receiving more attention from diverse groups and the initial adapta-

tion for Latino parents reported to be positive (Matos, Torres, Santiago, Jurado, & Rodriguez, 2006; McCabe, Yeh, Garland, Lau, & Chavez, 2005). In addition, the *Incredible Years* has been utilized successfully in Canada, Norway, and the United Kingdom (Webster-Stratton, 2000). It appears that the empirically supported parent training programs are gaining a greater amount of attention from diverse cultural groups due to their already proven effectiveness.

While the attempts, however limited, to study parent training programs for diverse parent groups are evident, the efforts to consider parenting programs for Christian parents (or parents from other religious groups) are difficult to locate from the body of literature reviewed in the current paper. Even though parents' spirituality and cultural values are inseparable from their parenting behaviors, spirituality or religious values do not seem to have received the appropriate amount of attention among the empirically supported parent training programs.

Recently, Walker & Qualiana (2007) has demonstrated how relevant Scripture passages can be explicitly integrated into an existing parent training program designed by Barkley. This study suggests that it is helpful to discuss with the parents in training about the relationship between the problem of sin and their child's misbehavior. Also, the study relates the concept of the so called "best fit" between the child and the environment to Proverbs 22:6: "Train a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not turn from it" (NIV). Attending skills in parent training and the token economy concept are based on Proverbs 13:24, which says "Spare the rod, spoil the child," and Proverbs 22:6 and the Parable of the Talents in Matthew 25:14, respectively. Furthermore, the therapeutic use of time-out is integrated with Galatians 6:7-8, which involves the "law of natural consequences."

In evaluation, integrating a parent training model to biblical passages, as done in Walker & Qualiana, does not seem to yield apparent results, and the interested readers should consult the original works before considering the study's use of biblical passages in depth. In general, the above integration model may provide biblical foundations for Christian parents who are interested in parent training programs, but the efficacy of the integration needs to be demonstrated by follow-up studies.

## Conclusions

The current body of literature examined in this paper shows that parent training programs are effective for children's externalized behaviors. There are a number of empirically supported parent training programs available. However, when diverse groups of parents are considered,

their efficacy and the availability of parent training programs appear to be limited. Christian parents, economically disadvantaged parents, parents who suffer from psychopathology, and parents from Non-Western countries may not be able to utilize the parent training programs to the fullest extent.

Therefore, parent training programs should be examined further for specialized parent groups. Christian parents from multicultural backgrounds appear to need more focused attention because their parenting behaviors are likely to be influenced by both their cultural values as well as their Christian faith practices. This study shows that in addition to examining the empirically supported programs for the aforementioned specialized parent groups for their efficacy, a thorough evaluation of the underlying principles, values, and theories of parent training programs must also be conducted.

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