

Evaluation shows

parent training program holds promise for a child welfare population

Overview

Casey Family Programs supports the efforts of child welfare agencies to safely reduce the need for foster care by promoting prevention and early intervention services designed to strengthen families and ensure that every child can live in a safe, nurturing, and permanent family.

To that end, Casey Family Programs conducted an evaluation that provides some preliminary evidence of effectiveness for a child welfare population of an existing evidence-based program—*The Incredible Years Parent Training Program*. Information on effective models for this population is lacking.

This summary presents the results of a recent outcome and implementation evaluation involving staff and 24 caregivers at two agencies in New York that used *The Incredible Years* for the first time. *The Incredible Years* is focused on enhancing parenting skills, knowledge of child development, positive child behavior, and parent-child relationships. The program was delivered by two group leaders in groups of six to 12 caregivers for two hours each week over a period of 16 to 20 weeks. It includes discussions, problem solving, skills training, role play practice, and DVD vignettes of parent-child interactions.

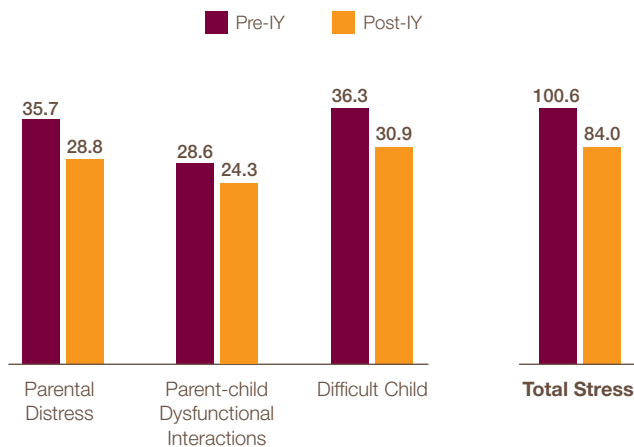
Study finds evidence-based program was associated with decreased caregiver stress, more empathy toward children, and greater social support

RESULTS

At the end of the intervention, caregivers reported:

- **Lower levels of parenting stress.** Figure 1 displays these findings for the stress subscales and total stress before and after the intervention. For many families, the change in scores before and after the intervention represents a clinically significant reduction in stress. For example, **56 percent** of caregivers experienced clinical levels of parental distress prior to participation in *The Incredible Years* compared to only **25 percent** after.
- **Increased empathy toward their children.** Empathy was the only one of five dimensions on a parenting attitude scale that showed a significant difference before and after participation. Lack of empathy is one risk factor associated with parents who maltreat.
- **More family and overall support after participation.**

Figure 1: Pre-/Post-Intervention Parenting Stress Index Scores



In addition, staff reported that caregivers were more aware of behaviors that were defeating their parenting and showed increased understanding and acceptance of positive discipline approaches. Staff confirmed the finding that caregivers were more self-aware and showed greater empathy toward their

children. Staff also said that caregivers established more routines, decreased fighting in the home, and had stronger emotional connections with their children.

Participants agreed that group leaders were sensitive and knowledgeable, strength-based and empowering, culturally competent, and encouraging of caregivers' relationships with others.

IMPLEMENTATION CHALLENGES

Of all the challenges, covering the material in the allotted time was the most common. It is expected that it will take longer for high-risk families to master the program concepts, and so more time may be needed. Group leaders also indicated that the DVD vignettes did not represent a broad range of ethnic and socioeconomic diversity, and this seemed to pose a barrier to participant engagement.

During the course of program implementation, the updated version of *The Incredible Years* was released with more diverse vignettes. The program developer guided staff on selecting vignettes relevant to the culture of the caregivers in their groups and on therapeutic approaches for delivering them with cultural sensitivity. Finally, challenges in participants' own lives became salient barriers to program engagement.

CONCLUSION

The Incredible Years Parent Training Program demonstrates effectiveness in improving child behavior and parenting skills in a dozen randomized trials and is listed by several registries as an evidence-based program. Yet it has not yet been established as an evidence-based program specifically for a child welfare population. If the use of evidence-based programs in child welfare is going to increase, understanding implementation challenges faced by community agencies is necessary. Evaluating the implementation and outcomes of an evidence-based program in child welfare settings is an initial step toward addressing the gap between research and practice for improving the well-being of children and families involved with child welfare.

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More information about *The Incredible Years* can be found online at: www.incredibleyears.com.

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