Hot Tips

For Delivering Incredible Years Group Programs Online

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Five years ago, I was resistant to the idea of online Incredible Years (IY) video tele-session training and had never used platforms like Zoom or Teams to deliver parent interventions. I strongly believed in the importance of face-to-face interactions for experiential learning, group problem-solving, role-plays, and practice. Group training, in particular, was the most satisfying aspect of my own clinical work and training new leaders. Research from randomized controlled trials (Webster-Stratton, 1984; Webster-Stratton et al., 1988) suggested that group-based interventions with facilitator-led video modeling led to better outcomes compared to methods based on individual one-on-one feedback and self-administered video learning. The power of group support and interpersonal relationships was key to parents' engagement with the program and ability to change behaviors. Many parents in IY groups even expressed reluctance when their 18-week in-person 2-hour sessions ended, often planning to continue supporting each other afterward. I couldn't imagine online training being an effective substitute for in-person group dynamics, as it felt impersonal and challenging to establish meaningful connections.

However, the COVID-19 pandemic forced me to reconsider. With restrictions on travel and group gatherings, I was compelled to experiment with online training. Initially, the technology felt intimidating and frustrating, which affected my enthusiasm and effectiveness. Yet, I gradually began to appreciate certain aspects of online delivery and explored ways to replicate in-person experiences.

I realized that the success of online training doesn't lie in the platform but in how the group leader fosters trust, engagement, and connection. One key strategy is for leaders to experiment with technology to make sessions more interactive and fun

while being flexible with content delivery and technology challenges. Although I still find online sessions more exhausting than face-to-face ones, I've seen several benefits. Online training allows greater flexibility, especially for parents facing scheduling conflicts, transportation issues, or health concerns. Early data even suggests that drop-out rates may be lower for online training than in-person group training, as sessions can be more easily rescheduled.

While I miss the in-person interactions—such as providing tangible rewards or offering physical comfort like hugs—I have found new ways to support parents online, such as using fun stickers, rewards, and encouraging work-life balance. Participant feedback has been positive, with parents noting that the online format is "definitely better than nothing."

Benefits and Barriers of Online IY Delivery

 The online format allows parents to participate remotely, reducing logistical barriers like travel and childcare issues. It's also easier to include extended family members or partners in sessions, enhancing family support. However, some logistical challenges remain, such as finding quiet spaces for discussions and ensuring reliable technology access. Additionally, online interactions can feel less personal, and non-verbal cues can be misinterpreted, which can hinder relationship building.

Since those early days of Covid, I've learned so much about how to effectively deliver on-line individual or group IY programs. In this article I will share strategies for how to make your groups most effective. This will cover "hot tips" for selecting parents for on-line training, tailoring the IY video vignettes, determining number of sessions needed, and ways to promote essential IY methods, processes and fidelity principles. Group leaders will learn how to share their screen to mediate video vignette reflections and to promote more intimacy by using on-line rooms for buzzes and practices. The chat function and white boards can be used to record key IY principles and the IY web site can be used to share weekly refrigerator notes and home activities and to access editable weekly record sheets, and session evaluations.

Session Format for Online IY Training

Assessing Family Needs and Readiness for Online Delivery

Before starting online sessions, it's important to assess the family's needs, goals and readiness for the on-line format. This includes understanding their level of stress or depression, childcare availability, technology access, and any specific family challenges. It's also essential to ensure privacy, as online sessions must adhere to confidentiality guidelines. Once parents are ready, the group leader can determine whether an individual or group format works best for the family.

1. **Individual One-on-One Online Readiness and Engagement Session**

   o Assess parent goals for themselves and their children.
   o Assess parent stress & children's challenging behaviors.
   o Complete *How I am Incredible* form.
   o Promote relationship between group leader and parents.
   o Explain online format for group training & things needed.
   o Review parent schedule, best times available & childcare issues.
   o Troubleshoot any logistical/technical barriers.

2. **First Group Session (60-90 minutes):**

   o Review rules for online training and expectations for participation such as importance of seeing faces, time schedule & availability of toys and puppets.
   o Check in on family stress levels and self-care strategies.
   o Have parents share information about their children's developmental needs using the *How I Am Incredible* form.
   o Discuss parents' goals for themselves and their children.
   o Explain how the IY curriculum will address parent goals.
   o Be sure parents have the parent book and handouts.

3. **Subsequent Sessions (24-28 1–2-hour sessions):**

   o Check in on parents' progress regarding home activities from prior session. Share their successes, discuss barriers and problem solve possible solutions.
   o Introduce new content and how it relates to their goals.
   o Use break-out rooms to discuss benefits and barriers to session parenting skill topic (e.g., child directed play, social coaching, limit setting etc.).
   o Facilitate discussions of selected video vignettes & record key principles on chat or white board.
   o Set up role-play practices, initially in the main room followed by smaller breakout room practices.
   o Summarize key session principles and review Refrigerator Notes.

Closing Sessions:

- Parents determine their weekly goals on the self-monitoring checklist.
- Explain home assignments and record sheets, encourage parents to complete session evaluations, and confirm the time for the next session.

Session On-Line Structure Overview

USE VIDEOTAPES IN A COLLABORATIVE WAY TO ENHANCE TEACHING

1. **Group Check-in Buzz (5 minutes):**

   o Put parents in small break out rooms with 1-2 other parents as soon as they arrive. Ask them to share their successes. This gets parents engaged right away while waiting for others to arrive online. Coleader can call any parents who haven't arrived while the other leader monitors break out rooms and adds parents as they arrive.

2. **Group Welcome & Home Activity Review**

   - o   Meet back in main room to share key successes.
   - o   Discuss any barriers and brainstorm possible solutions.

3. **New Content (20-30 minutes)**:

   - o   Introduction to the session's topic.
   - o   Group leaders facilitate discussion around barriers and benefits related to the new skills being addressed.
   - o   Use carefully selected vignettes for group discussion and setting up role play practices.
   - o   Engage role play practices in large group to provide live modeling of skills before small group break out practices.
   - o   For large group practices, you could ask all parents except for "actors" to turn off their cameras. This makes it easier for parents to only see the actors during the practice. Invite everyone to turn on camera for debriefing.
   - o   Breakout rooms are used for deeper discussions, to tailor learning for child's specific developmental level and more practice.
   - o   Record key ideas and scripts using Chat button. Review in large main room.

4. **Closing Sessions**:

   - o   Key principles learned are summarized by leader using Chat principles.
   - o   Use screen sharing to highlight refrigerator notes, key learning principles, and parent-recorded principles.
   - o   Parents set and share goals for the week, and evaluations are completed.

5. **Group Leader's Post Session Weekly Follow-Up**:

   - o   Handouts sent via email, including digital versions of home activities, editable record sheets, and evaluations.
   - o   **Zoom-specific tips**: Preparing technology, using screen share, facilitating discussion, and managing breakout rooms.
   - o   Group leaders use co-hosts to manage tasks (e.g., letting participants in, troubleshooting tech issues).
   - o   Determine which parents each leader will call.

Best Practices for Online Sessions

- **Tech Preparation**: Test video and audio, have a backup plan, and share Zoom or Teams details (like recurring meetings and settings).
- **Camera Use**: Position the camera properly to ensure good face visibility and engagement.
- **Body Language**: Leaders look interested and engaged by leaning in and maintaining active body language.
- **Breakout Room Use**: Tailor room groupings based on the developmental level of each child, allowing for targeted discussions and practices on specific parenting strategies.
- **Interactive Tools**:
  - Use screen share for videos.
  - Use chat for recording responses or summarizing ideas and principles during group discussions.
  - Breakout rooms are useful to practice coaching scripts and strategies based on child's age and developmental levels.
  - Share key ideas with the larger group after each breakout session.
  - Use on-line visuals and icons to express positive feedback in addition to praise

Parent Engagement

- **Sharing Observations**: Parents observe videos, discuss their thoughts and feelings about parent and child behavior and how to address challenges. Notes are recorded on Chat.
- **Breakout Rooms**: Parents practice parenting strategies with role-playing, tailored to their child's age or developmental needs.
- **Parent-to-Parent Interaction**: Parents share tips and strategies based on their experiences in smaller groups.

Additional Tips for Group Leaders

- **Use Clear, Positive Language**: Focus on rephrasing negative commands and promoting positive communication techniques.
- **Use parent "thought cards"** from web site. These can be used to record favorite ideas or to rewrite their negative thoughts into more positive coping thoughts.
  https://www.incredibleyears.com/resources/groupleaders?name__icontains=thought
- **Rewarding and Praising on-line:** Encourage parents to praise each other via chat or use thumbs up on Zoom. Give fun sticky note rewards to parents who volunteer or have a success. Tool awards can also be given.
  https://www.incredibleyears.com/resources/groupleaders?name__icontains=award
- **Promote Parent Connection**: Encourage participants to share their experiences and challenges, making sure all parents feel involved.
- **Create Safe, Supportive Environment**: Foster an environment of trust and respect to help parents feel comfortable discussing their experiences.
- **Encourage Parent Connections between Sessions**: Just as for in-person group sessions set up weekly buddy check-ins by phone or texts or on-line or in-person. Parents are asked to briefly share using one of the strategies they learned from the prior session. Sometimes groups do their own Zoom calls with each other and introduce their children.
- **Group Leader Check-In Calls:** Using an on-line platform reach out to parents individually each week to check in on their family's current situation stress level and coping strategies. Ask about their goals for the week and experiences.

Tailoring Incredible Years Methods for Online Delivery

The next section outlines how group leaders tailor their use of several core Incredible Years methods and processes to maximize their effectiveness online.

Benefits/Barriers Exercise:

To start each new topic group leaders ask parents to identify the benefits of specific parenting skills, such as persistence, emotional literacy, routines, limit setting, established routines or healthy eating habits. This is followed by a discussion of the perceived barriers to being able to do this. These are written down on the white board or in the chat. Afterwards the parents review these 2 lists. This process encourages parents to reflect on how these strategies benefit their child in the long term, even if they face short-term barriers. This helps parents understand the value of the skills being taught and encourages them to push past immediate obstacles. This approach also helps the group leader to understand the issues that parents face when using these approaches which can be incorporated into discussions of specific vignettes.

For example, when discussing persistence, parents might realize that while it's challenging to encourage their child to stick with tasks, persistence will eventually build their child's resilience and problem-solving abilities. Similarly, discussing emotion literacy might help parents understand that developing their child's vocabulary around emotions will improve communication and emotional regulation in the long run.

Role Play and Practice:

Role-playing practice is an essential part of the online parenting sessions. Group leaders select parents to model the behavior being taught and another parent to be their child. Large group practices are frequently followed by break out room practices. Dyads or triads for these small group practices are selected according to having children at similar language, play and temperament developmental levels. These role play practices help parents learn how to tailor their language and approach specifically for their own child. These practices also allow parents to give and receive feedback in a low-pressure environment, which builds confidence in using new techniques.

Principles and Feedback:

As parents discuss their experiences or share ideas, group leaders encourage the identification of key principles. For instance, a principle might be staying calm when setting limits because it models emotional control for the child. The group leader

records these principles in the chat or whiteboard and praises the parents for their insights. This positive reinforcement boosts parent engagement and helps reinforce key learning moments.

Online Tools and Support:
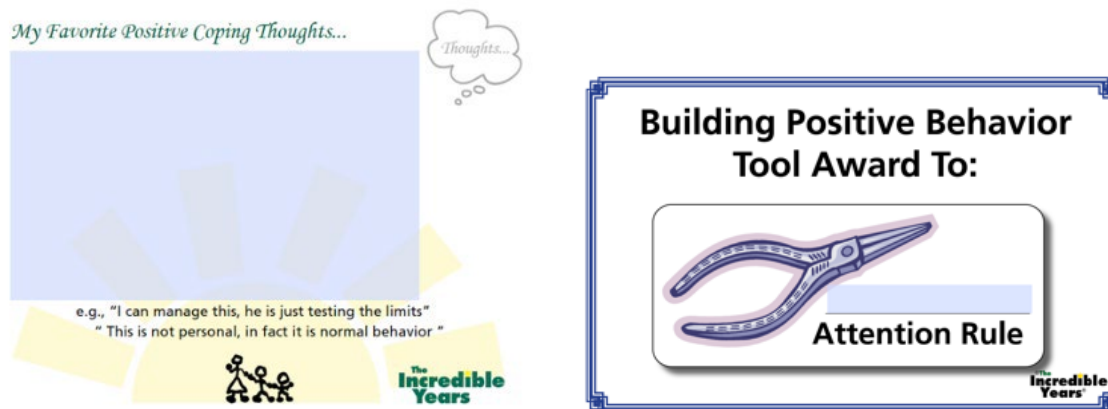
To keep parents engaged and connected, group leaders utilize various tools such as thought cards, buzz forms, and rewards. These tools encourage parents to share strategies, reflect on their experiences, and focus on positive reinforcement. For example, parents may write down coping thoughts or relaxation strategies on their personal thought cards or participate in a buzz session to share ideas.
https://www.incredibleyears.com/resources/groupleaders?name__icontains=thought

Rewarding parents with digital stickers, tool awards, and private messages for their efforts motivates participation. Group leaders can also send certificates of completion after the program, creating a sense of accomplishment.
https://www.incredibleyears.com/resources/groupleaders?name__icontains=award

Evaluation and Feedback:

Group leaders review weekly assignments, track progress, and adjust future sessions based on parent feedback. Evaluations, such as pre- and post-program assessments, help measure the effectiveness of the online delivery method and its impact on parents and children. These evaluations help refine the approach and ensure that parents are receiving the support they need.

Technical Support and Peer Collaboration:

Group leaders are encouraged to collaborate with colleagues, practice using the platform, and learn from one another. This peer support is essential in overcoming

technological challenges and enhancing the group leaders' effectiveness in delivering the program.

Conclusion:

By blending interactive activities, role-playing practices, parent and leader feedback, and collaborative learning, online parenting groups can be a powerful way to support parents in implementing positive behaviors and techniques. This method emphasizes the importance of reflecting on parenting strategies, practicing skills, receiving ongoing support and creating a sense of community among parents. While online training presents certain challenges, it also offers unique opportunities, especially for families who otherwise may not be able to attend in-person sessions. This format could extend the reach of IY programs and make them more accessible for diverse families, including those with scheduling conflicts, transportation issues, or health concerns.

While further research is needed to compare the effectiveness of online vs. in-person training, the online approach provides a valuable option during times when in-person delivery is not possible.

References

Many more references can be found in the library of the web site.
https://www.incredibleyears.com/research/library

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