

Tailoring an Evidence-Based Practice to Parents Raising Preschoolers with Autism: Pilot Trial of *The Incredible Years*

Sarah Dababnah, MPH, MSW, PhD, University of Maryland, Baltimore; Erin M. Olson, PhD, Providence Regional Medical Center; Stacie Huntington, Onslow County Partnership for Children

BACKGROUND

Caregiver strain and burden are high in families raising children with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD). Parents of preschool children with ASD are particularly vulnerable to stress and depression. High parent stress is associated with several negative outcomes, including child social difficulties, strained parent-child attachment, and marital unhappiness. Yet, few interventions address the direct needs of this growing population of children and their families.

OBJECTIVES

The current study evaluated the outcomes of an existing evidence-based parenting program, *The Incredible Years*, tailored to caregivers of young children with ASD (IY-ASD). With a basis in child-directed play, the 12-14 week group program focuses on improving child-parent communication, problem solving, stress management, and school readiness, as well as to reduce challenging child behaviors and poor family dynamics.

DESIGN & METHODS

- 2 sites, no comparison group
- 7 parent groups
- Recruitment: community convenience sample
- Pre- and post-tests measured changes in caregiver stress and coping, and child behavior
- Acceptability and fidelity assessed using measures from *Incredible Years* manual
- Data analysis: two-tailed, paired t-tests ($p < .05$) and basic descriptive statistical procedures using SPSS

SAMPLE

32 caregivers and their children across two study sites in Washington ($n=18$) and North Carolina ($n=14$):

Caregiver Characteristics

- **Race or ethnicity:** White ($n=14$, 45.2%); Latino(a) ($n=6$; 18.8%); Black ($n=3$; 9.4%); Multiracial ($n=3$; 9.4%); Asian ($n=2$; 6.3%)
- **Marital status:** Married or partnered ($n=24$, 75.0%); **Education:** High school or less ($n=8$, 25.0%); College graduate or higher ($n=22$, 68.6%)
- **Family income (in \$1000s):** \$0-24 ($n=6$, 18.8%); \$25-49 ($n=7$, 21.9%); \$50-74 ($n=5$, 15.6%); \$75+ ($n=11$, 34.3%)
- **Relationship to child:** Mother ($n=25$; 78.2%); Father ($n=5$; 15.6%); Other ($n=2$; 6.3%)

Child Characteristics

- **Race:** White ($n=14$, 45.2%); Asian ($n=6$; 18.8%); Latino(a) ($n=5$; 15.6%); Multiracial ($n=5$; 15.6%); Black ($n=1$; 3.1%)
- **Child age at diagnosis:** 2.90 ± 0.98 years
- **Number of children in family:** 2.59 ± 1.72
- **Number of services child receives:** 2.28 ± 1.05

RESULTS

Child Behavior (N=32):

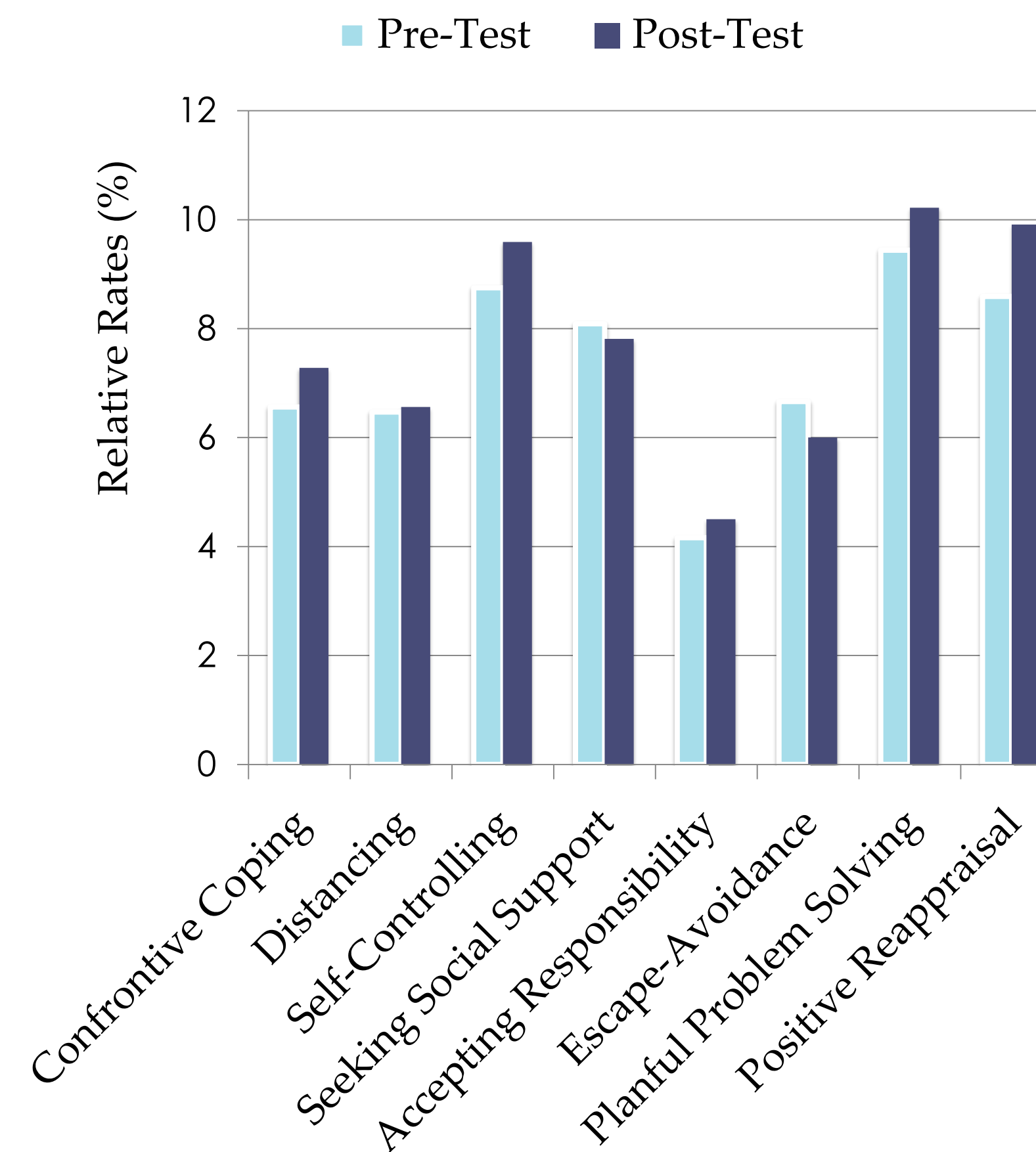
Aberrant Behavior Checklist

Scale	Pre-Test M (SD)	Post-Test M (SD)	T	d
Irritability	17.28 (10.35)	13.09 (9.61)	2.82**	0.42
Lethargy	12.75 (9.30)	10.13 (8.39)	2.36*	0.30
Stereotypic Behavior	5.28 (5.08)	4.56 (5.15)	0.77	
Hyperactivity	23.25 (11.83)	18.38 (11.05)	2.53*	0.43
Inappropriate Speech	3.03 (2.76)	2.97 (2.49)	0.16	

Note. * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$

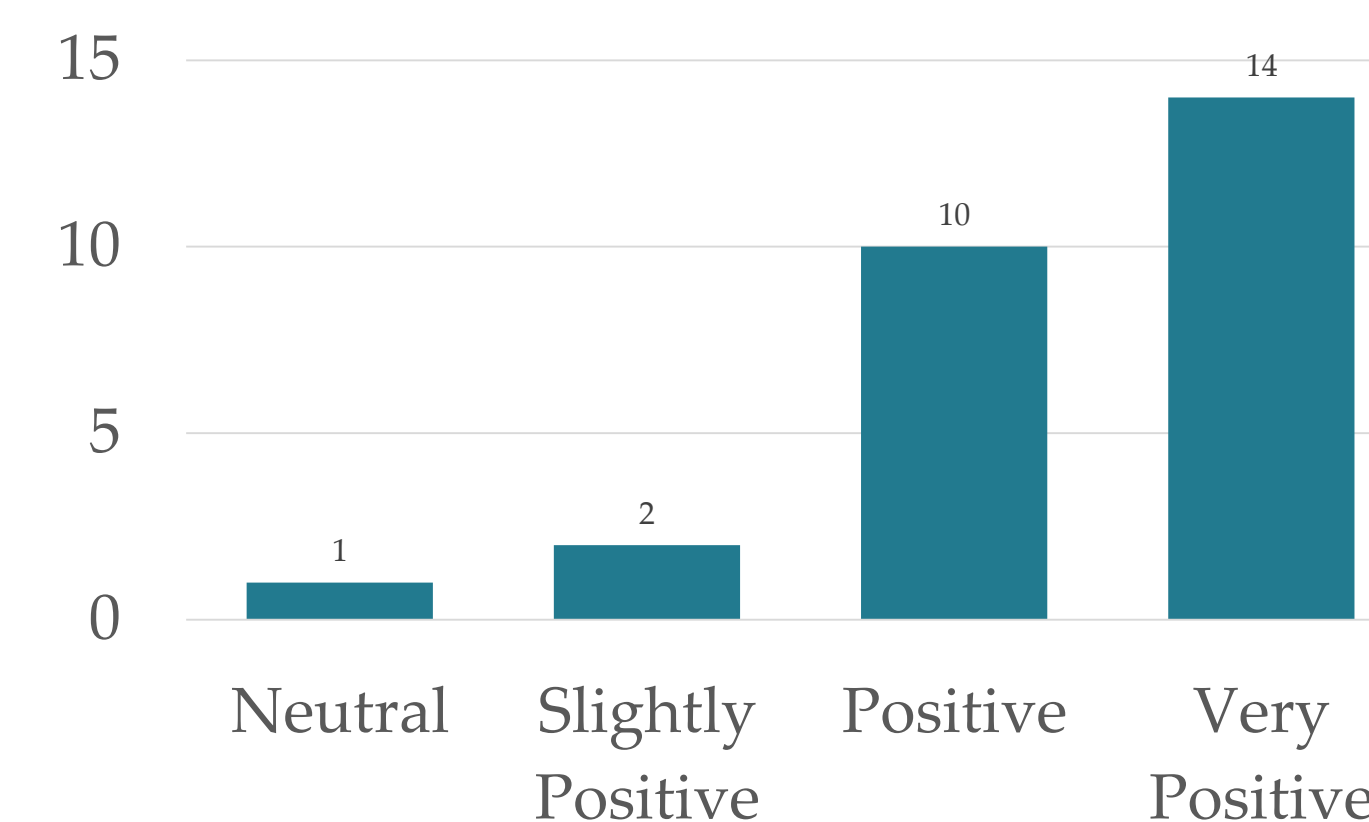
Caregiver Coping Strategies (N=32)

Ways of Coping Questionnaire



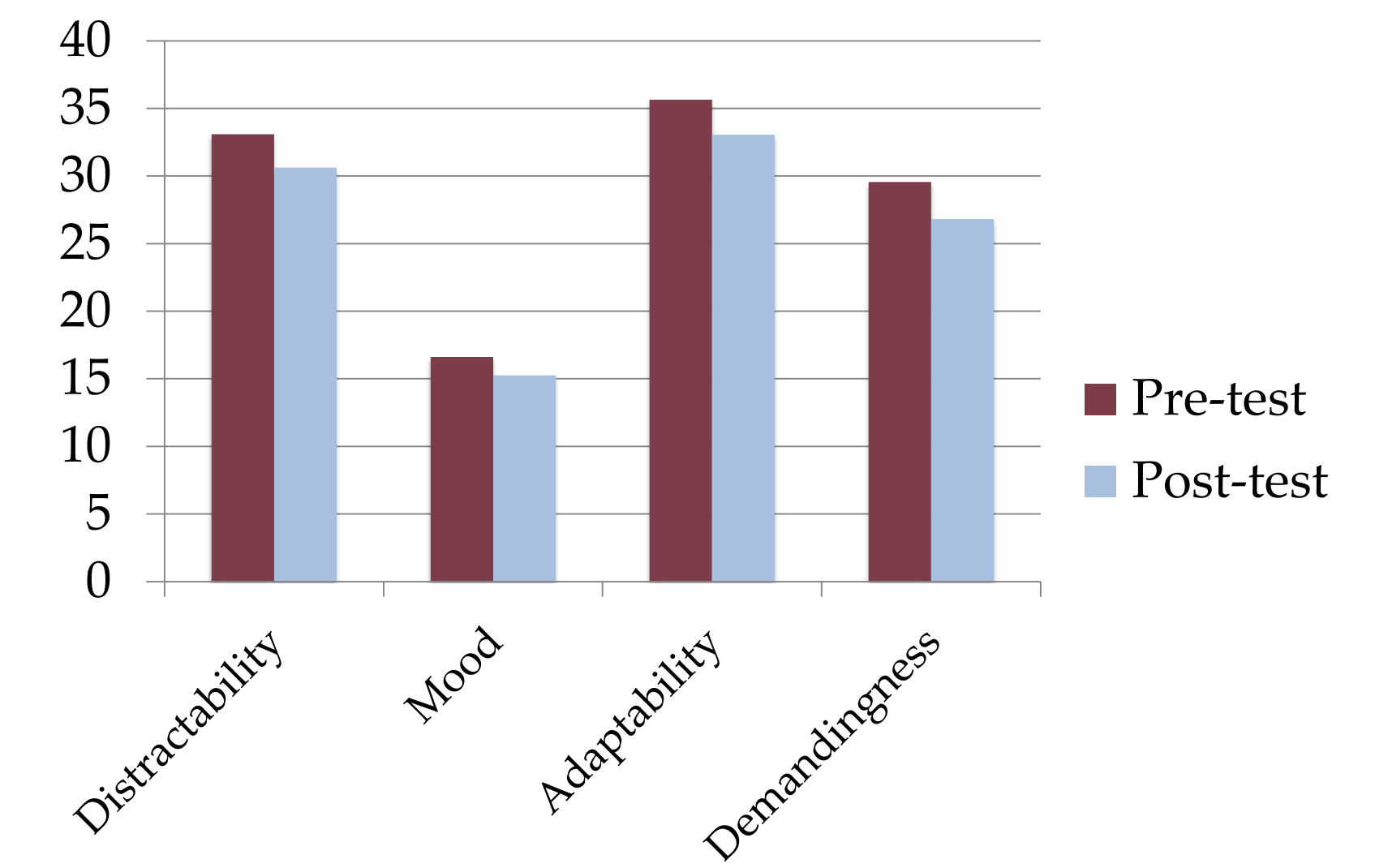
Note. No changes on the Ways of Coping Questionnaire were statistically significant at the $p < .05$ level.

Satisfaction (N=27)



Caregiver Stress (N=32)

Parenting Stress Index – 4th Edition



Note. Only subscales with significant change at posttest are displayed.

Summary Scale	Pre-Test M (SD)	Post-Test M (SD)	T	d
Child-Related Stress	148.50 (21.16)	137.91 (21.15)	3.70**	0.50
Parent – Related Stress	135.31 (32.04)	130.75 (29.53)	1.31	
Total Stress	283.81 (46.55)	268.66 (45.58)	2.77**	0.33

Note. * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$

CONCLUSIONS

- IY-ASD is a promising practice for parents raising preschoolers with ASD.
- A randomized controlled trial is needed to rigorously test the intervention.
- More research is necessary to investigate further intervention modifications to improve outcomes for young children with ASD and their parents.