



The Benefits of Parenting Education

A Review of the Literature for the Wilder Parent Education Center

In the spring of 2016, Wilder Research conducted a literature review of parent education programs. The following summarizes the key benefits and best practices around parenting education that emerged from this review.

Key benefits of Parenting Education

■ Improves parental empowerment and competency

Parenting education improves parents' sense of self-efficacy and competency, as well as parental satisfaction. It can also result in positive changes in parents' attitudes about parenting as well as their self-esteem and feelings of self-mastery with regard to parenting.

■ Increases positive parenting practices

Parenting education promotes the use of positive parenting practices, such as using positive language, planned discipline, and family routines. It also encourages nurturing behavior and increases parents' knowledge of child development and communication styles.

■ Increases social connections

Parenting education often results in more social connections among parents. Parents use these connections to exchange parenting advice, provide emotional support, and share resources. This can lead to more positive feelings about parenting overall.

■ Improves child behavior

Children of parents who participate in parenting education programs often demonstrate increases in their prosocial behaviors (e.g., empathy, sharing, helping others) and decreases in negative externalizing behaviors (e.g., aggression, delinquency, hyperactivity).

■ Improves parent-child interactions

Parenting education programs can help improve communication skills between parents and children, and result in an overall better understanding between family members.

■ Improves parental mental health and well-being.

Parents may also experience short-term improvements in mental health, including a decrease in depression, anxiety, anger, guilt, and stress.

■ Decreases use of corporal punishment and risk of child abuse

Parent education programs help parents learn alternatives to physical punishment and change the family mindset regarding appropriate expectations of children, appropriate family roles, and other values that discourage the use of corporal punishment.

Best practices in Parenting Education

The following identifies strategies or practices used in parenting education that research has found to be consistently associated with positive outcomes for families.

- ✓ **Actively engage parents.** Successful parenting programs provide opportunities for parents to practice the skills they are learning, either with a professional, at home, on-site with their child, or in a group setting.
- ✓ **Reach parents early.** Programs aimed at serving new parents or parents of young children are better able to address challenges early, which sets the stage for more positive experiences later in life.
- ✓ **Make cultural adaptations.** Effective programs adapt materials and other program elements to accommodate the unique needs and cultural traditions of the families they are serving.
- ✓ **Offer frequent sessions over several months.** Programs that run over several months and meet at least weekly tend to have the best outcomes.
- ✓ **Promote family routines.** Effective parenting programs emphasize the importance of family roles, regular family routines, and family activities.
- ✓ **Use skilled parent educators.** Parents benefit most from programs that use trained parent education facilitators.

The Wilder Foundation's Parent Education Center offers the Incredible Years program, which is an evidence-based parenting education program. In particular, the program supports parents and their young children ages 0-12 years through active, hands-on experiences using trained parent education professionals. It also uses culturally specific adaptations for Hmong and African American participants. The program engages parents and children in regular weekly sessions over the course of 3 months. Based on this review, the Wilder Parent Education Center implementation of The Incredible Years program model is consistent with the best practice elements identified in the literature.

We are grateful for the opportunity to serve the Child Development Center with this literature review. We thank the Child Development Center and its funders (particularly The Grotto Foundation) for supporting this work. We also wish to acknowledge Wilder Research's library staff, especially Rachel Fields, for their assistance in identifying and gathering these resources used in this literature review.

This summary is based on a literature review completed by Wilder Research in October 2016 entitled *The Benefits of Parenting Education: A Literature Review for the Wilder Parent Education Center*. To view the complete report and list of references, please visit www.wilderresearch.org

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OCTOBER 2016