

# Watching TV Can Improve Parenting And Child Behaviour

November 22 2006

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Watching television parenting programmes like ITV's Driving Mum and Dad Mad really can help improve parenting skills and modify children's behavioural problems, according to a study at The University of Manchester.

The six-part series followed the progress of five families whose children showed clear behavioural problems through Professor Matt Sanders' "Triple P-Positive Parenting Programme," which provides guidance on parenting skills which promote good behavioural and emotional adjustment.

In "The Great Parenting Experiment: The role of the mass media in preventing anti-social behaviour in children," clinical psychologists Dr Rachel Calam and Professor Sanders himself studied a sample of the 4.2 million parents tuning into the first series in Spring 2005. Funded by the Home Office's Respect Task Force, the team assessed how much watching the programmes actually helped parents at home.

Dr Calam said: "This is the first national experiment to monitor parents working alongside a "TV info-tainment" series and trying out the techniques shown. We wanted to assess whether, by adopting the ideas suggested, mums and dads were able to improve their children's behaviour and reduce their own stress levels.

"465 parents completed an assessment of their children's behaviour, parenting practices, confidence as a parent, stress levels and family

circumstances before the series, which was repeated 12 weeks after the series started and again six months later. Parents who just watched the series and those given additional "enhanced support" reported significantly fewer problems with both their children's conduct and their parenting practices after 12 weeks.

"Over 40% of the children who had had severe behavioural problems at the beginning of the study showed clinically-reliable changes in behaviour, and moved into the "normal" range on measures of disruptive behaviour.

"The parents also reported higher confidence in their ability to manage behavioural problems; 45% of them saying they were very much less likely to over-react to difficult behaviour."

The parents receiving the enhanced support showed fewer problems at the 12-week point in terms of child behaviour problems, parenting practices, and parental conflict, but both levels of intervention proved effective at reducing levels of parental distress and conflict and modifying children's behaviour problems.

Professor Sanders said: "Across the board, parents' sense of their own effectiveness significantly improved, with parents reporting clinically-significant increases in confidence in dealing with difficult behaviours and situations (like bedtimes and taking children to the supermarket). The level of improvement in children's behaviour was unrelated to the initial severity of the child's conduct problem, with children who had the most severe problems at the beginning doing just as well as other children with less severe problems.

"The improvements associated with watching the series were maintained after six months, and it is extremely encouraging to see that so many parents benefited from it. Our findings indicate that the media can be

used constructively to provide parenting information and advice in an entertaining way, and can bring real positive outcomes to both parents and children."

Source: University of Manchester

Citation: Watching TV Can Improve Parenting And Child Behaviour (2006, November 22)  
retrieved 2 May 2024 from

<https://medicalxpress.com/news/2006-11-tv-parenting-child-behaviour.html>

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