

# Five effective parenting programs to reduce problem behaviors in children

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All parents want what's best for their children. But not every parent knows how to provide their child with the tools to be successful, or how to help them avoid the biggest adolescent behavior problems: substance use, delinquency, school dropout, pregnancy and violence.

These problems can affect [children](#) for the rest of their lives. University of Washington researchers evaluated about 20 parenting programs and found five that are especially effective at helping parents and children at all risk levels avoid adolescent behavior problems that affect not only individuals, but entire communities.

"With these programs, you see marked decreases in drug use, reduced aggression, reduced depression and anxiety, and better mental health," said Kevin Haggerty, assistant director of the UW's Social Development Research Group in the School of Social Work.

"You see the impact of when parents get on the same page and work together to provide an environment that promotes wellbeing. You can make long-term impacts."

The study is published in the current issue of the *Journal of Children's Services*.

Haggerty said it's ironic that parents spend hours taking birthing classes to prepare for something that will happen naturally, yet there is no training on how to actually parent a child. He took a parenting workshop

years ago and said learning how to deal with conflict changed his family's dynamic.

"All of us need a little help parenting," Haggerty said. "It's a tough job and we didn't get the instruction manual when our kids were born."

The programs recommended by Haggerty and his co-authors are effective with a wide variety of families in diverse settings. All five programs are consistent with the Social Development Model, which focuses on fostering opportunities, skills, rewards for positive social behaviors, bonding and clear expectations for behavior.

The programs include changing known risk factors such as poor parental supervision and high family conflict, and show children what "normal" family behavior looks like. The programs also have scientific evidence showing that they work.

Nurse-Family Partnership sends registered nurses to visit young, first-time, single mothers at least once every two weeks during their first pregnancy and until their child is 2 years old. Nurses help expecting moms reduce smoking, drinking and drug use. After the child is born, nurses help mothers create safe environments for their children and develop strategies for dealing with difficult behaviors.

Positive Parenting Program is a flexible system of programs that focuses on five main goals: promoting safe and engaging environments, creating positive learning environments, using effective discipline, creating clear and reasonable expectations, and self-care for parents.

The Incredible Years teaches children ages 3-6, their parents and teachers skills and strategies for handling difficult situations. Parents participate in group sessions; children take part in therapist-led group sessions, which help children develop skills such as problem solving,

making friends, and cooperating with others. (This program was developed by Carolyn Webster-Stratton, now director of UW's Parenting Research Clinic.)

**In Strengthening Families Program: For Parents and Youth 10-14,** parents learn about risk factors for substance use, parent-child bonding, consequences for not following parental guidelines, manage anger and family conflict their children learn effective communication, problem solving, and how to resist peer pressure.

**Staying Connected with Your Teen** helps children 12-17 years old avoid risky sexual activity, drug use, and violent behavior. The program helps parents set strong norms with their teen against antisocial behavior by increasing parental monitoring, reducing harsh parenting, and rewarding teens to promote family bonding. (This program was developed by Richard F. Catalano and J. David Hawkins in the UW School of Social Work.)

Haggerty and his fellow researchers hope local policymakers will pay attention to these and other scientifically-tested programs as they discuss investments in child and adolescent resources. He said it's important to invest in children now, before negative outcomes cost society more in the form of law enforcement, prisons, and physical and mental treatment programs.

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