

Program for parents improves ADHD behaviors in young children

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Parents not only reported sustained improvements for their children's ADHD behaviors, but also for their social skills and interactions with peers. Credit: UNC's Frank Porter Graham Child Development Institute.

A program that focuses on strengthening parenting skills also improves symptoms of Attention Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) in 3-8 year-olds, according to researchers at the at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. FPG scientists completed a rigorous review of evidence that demonstrated the effectiveness of the "Incredible Years Basic Parent Program."

"Prior research already has shown that this program improves behavior difficulties in young [children](#)," said Desiree W. Murray, FPG's associate director of research. "This review provides new evidence specifically about its effectiveness for ADHD symptoms."

Murray explained that [parents](#) not only reported

sustained improvements for their children's ADHD behaviors, but also for their social skills and interactions with peers.

She said effective early intervention is crucial for young children with ADHD, due to the unfavorable short-term and long-term outcomes associated with the disorder.

"ADHD in preschoolers can bring conflict with family members, and it carries elevated risk of physical injuries and suspension or expulsion from child care settings," Murray said. "Negative trajectories over time can include the development of other psychiatric disorders and difficulties with social adjustment."

Previous studies have also shown that children with ADHD struggle academically, with lower test scores and higher risk of dropping out of high school.

"We can help to prevent the wide array of negative outcomes that are associated with ADHD," Murray said. "We believe the most effective intervention approaches may be those that target preschoolers with symptoms of ADHD but who have not yet met the full criteria for diagnosis with ADHD."

Murray and her team, which included FPG research scientist Doré R. LaForett and UNC doctoral student Jacqueline R. Lawrence, screened 258 studies and narrowed their list to 11 studies that met stringent criteria for rigor and methodology. The evidence—primarily parent reports—showed the effectiveness of the Incredible Years Basic Parent Program for ADHD behaviors in young children. The Journal of Emotional and Behavioral Disorders recently published the results of the team's review.

The Incredible Years Basic Parent Program is designed for parents of high-risk children and those who display behavioral problems. It focuses on helping parents strengthen relationships with their children, providing praise and incentives, setting

limits, establishing ground rules, and effectively addressing misbehavior.

Murray, a trained mentor for the Incredible Years Teacher Classroom Management program, explained that a key caregiver strategy that all IY programs teach—and which is particularly relevant for ADHD-related difficulties—is "coaching" [young children](#) to develop persistence, as well as academic, social, and emotional skills. As parents and others prompt, describe, and praise targeted behaviors, children learn to regulate their own emotions and behavior, and they become motivated to use these skills.

"We think an effective 12-14 session program is a modest investment for preschool children who are at risk for ADHD," she said. "The research shows it may promote long-term benefits that can move these children towards a more positive developmental path."

More information: Murray, D. W., Lawrence, J. R., & LaForett, D. R. (2017). The Incredible Years® programs for ADHD in young children: A critical review of the evidence. *Journal of Emotional and Behavioral Disorders*. Advance online publication. DOI: [10.1177/1063426617717740](https://doi.org/10.1177/1063426617717740)
[fpg.unc.edu/resources/incredib ... ical-review-evidence](https://fpg.unc.edu/resources/incredib...ical-review-evidence)

Provided by Frank Porter Graham Child Development Institute

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