

Programme title:

The Incredible Years

Website/for more information see:

<http://incredibleyears.com/>

What claims does the company make/what does the programme target?

The Incredible Years company describes several specific short-term goals of their training programmes, pertaining to parent-child relationships, classroom interactions, and intrinsic child behaviour (Webster-Stratton, 2014). Parent-specific goals include: improving parent-child interactions, developing positive attachments, less harsh and more nurturing parenting, and increasing parental problem solving and social support. Within the classroom, the programme purposes to improve teacher-student relationships, develop proactive classroom management skills, and strengthen teacher-parent partnerships. Goals for each child involve promotion of child social competence, emotional regulation, positive attributions, academic readiness, and problem solving. Finally, Incredible Years aims to prevent, reduce, and treat early-onset conduct behaviours and emotional problems, which leads to the overall long-term goal of preventing conduct disorders, academic underachievement, delinquency, violence, and drug abuse. To that end, the primary targets of Incredible Years are high-risk socioeconomically disadvantaged families, child protective service referred families and foster parents, and children with existing social and emotional behaviour problems, attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), internalising problems, developmental delays, and language delays (Webster-Stratton, 2014).

The outcomes that the Incredible Years company claims reflect these stated goals (Webster-Stratton, 2014). Through the use of the various programmes on offer, Incredible Years asserts clients have experienced increases in positive family problem solving communication, nurturing interactions, proactive parenting methods, and school involvement, reductions in parental stress, depression, and harsh disciplinary measures, increases in proactive classroom management strategies and teacher-parent collaborative partnerships, reductions in child externalising and internalising problems both at school and at home, and increases in children's emotional literacy, social skills, problem solving, compliance, and school readiness (Webster-Stratton, 2014).

What it involves:

The Incredible Years company provides a series of training programmes for parents, teachers, and children (Webster-Stratton, 2014). The first set of five parent programmes cover the span from birth to twelve years of age targeting key developmental stages and parent interpersonal problems. Four adjunct parenting programs cover additional needs: Well-Baby Prevention Program, Attentive Parenting Prevention Program, Autism Spectrum and Language Delays Program, and the School Readiness Program. The two child programmes both utilise a curriculum titled the “Dinosaur School Social, Emotional Skills and Problem Solving Curriculum.” These are the Small Group Dinosaur Child Treatment Program for four to eight years of age and the Classroom Dinosaur Prevention Program for three to eight years. Finally, there are the Incredible Beginnings Program and the Teacher Classroom Management Program for teachers of one- to five-year-olds and three- to eight-year-olds, respectively (Webster-Stratton, 2014).

Implementation of Incredible Years is possible in a wide variety of settings, including: preschools, primary grade schools, community centres, mental health centres, primary care practices, hospitals, social service centres, foster agencies, detention centres, homeless shelters, private businesses, private residences, and Head Start centres (Webster-Stratton, 2014).

Prices:

Basic Parenting Series (select combos available):

- Baby & Toddler Parenting Series (ages 0-3): US\$1,395
- Toddler Parenting Training Program: US\$895
- Preschool Basic Parenting Training Program (ages 3-6): US\$1,595
- Advanced Parenting Training Program (ages 4-12): US\$995
- School Age Basic Parenting Training Program (ages 6-12): US\$1,300

Advanced Parent Training Programs (select combos available):

- Well-Baby Program (ages 0-9 months): US\$395
- Autism Spectrum & Language Delays (ages 2-5): US\$895
- Attentive Parenting Training Program (ages 2-4 & 5-6): US\$995
- School Readiness Program: US\$595

Teacher Training Program Series:

- Teacher Classroom Management Program (ages 3-8): US\$1,350
- Incredible Beginnings Program for Child Care Providers and Teachers (ages 1-5): US\$1,450
- Emotional Regulation in Preschool: Teaching Children to Cope with Conflict: US\$195

Child Training Series:

- Small Group Dinosaur Child Training Program (ages 4-8): US\$1,300
- Classroom Dinosaur Curriculum (ages 3-8): US\$1,350

Also available for purchase: videos of expert-led sessions, guide books, home coach manuals, assorted supplemental items

Evidence for efficacy:

In the years since the development of the Incredible Years series, a large body of published, peer-reviewed research has investigated its use and applications in both clinical and community environments all over the world with a wide variety of populations. The evidence provided by these studies largely supports the claims of the company. Consistently observed outcomes include decreases in disruptive child behaviour and increases in prosocial behaviour, with larger effects for more severe cases (Axberg & Broberg, 2012; Azevedo et al., 2013; Gridley, Hutchings, & Baker-

Henningham, 2015; Hutchings et al., 2011; Jones et al., 2008; Kleve et al., 2010; Leijten et al., 2015; Letarte, Normandeau, & Allard, 2010; McDaniel et al., 2011; Posthumus et al., 2012), as well as improved parenting practices (Azevedo et al., 2013; Evans et al., 2015; Gridley, Hutchings, & Baker-Henningham, 2015; Homem et al., 2015; Leijten et al., 2015; Letarte, Normandeau, & Allard, 2010; Marcynyszyn, Maher, & Corwin, 2011; Posthumus et al., 2012). Populations represented in these studies include parents of children diagnosed with or showing early signs of oppositional defiance disorder, attention deficit hyperactivity disorder, and other conduct disorders, foster parents, families involved with Social Services or other child protection agencies, children in Head Start centres, socioeconomically disadvantaged families, and ethnic minorities. A recent meta-analysis of fifty studies on Incredible Years parent training with data from 4,745 participants calculated these effects to be sufficiently robust to incur fail-safe numbers of 1,351 and 300, referring to the number of additional studies with non-significant or adverse results that would need to exist in order to reduce the overall effect size for decreased disruptive behaviour and increased prosocial behaviour, respectively (Menting, Orobio de Castro, & Matthys, 2013). Qualitative analyses have also established that the Incredible Years parenting programmes are generally well-received by caretakers, which is critical to a programme for which success is dependent upon parental participation (Axberg & Broberg, 2012; Azevedo et al., 2013; Homem et al., 2015; Letarte, Normandeau, & Allard, 2010; Marcynyszyn, Maher, & Corwin, 2011). For greater detail, the findings of several recent studies are summarised briefly below.

1. *Evaluation of “The Incredible Years” in Sweden: The transferability of an American parent-training program to Sweden (Axberg & Broberg, 2012)*: This study assessed the effectiveness of the Incredible Years programme with 62 children between the ages of 4 and 8 diagnosed with oppositional defiant disorder; 38 took part in the intervention while 24 were assigned to a wait-list control group. Results indicated a highly significant reduction in disruptive behaviour problems, with 38% more children in the intervention group showing a statistically significant positive change (71% as compared to 33% in the control group). These results were maintained at a one-year follow-up. Though no significant differences were identified in teacher ratings of child behaviour at post-test, changes did manifest over time such that teachers reported significant differences at the time of the follow-up. Mothers reported a significant positive difference in parenting alliance, but the reported increase in parental control was non-significant between groups and there was no difference in mothers’ self-rated psychological symptoms. These findings support the efficacy of this programme with a particular clinical group of children with a behavioural disorder.
2. *The Incredible Years Basic Parent Training for Portuguese Preschoolers with AD/HD Behaviors: Does it Make a Difference? (Azevedo et al., 2013)*: This study investigated the use of Incredible Years training with parents of 100 hyperactive and inattentive preschoolers (52 assigned to intervention and 48 to a wait-list control group). After the 14-week intervention, mothers reported significantly reduced ADHD behaviours with no difference in oppositional or aggressive behaviours. These findings were corroborated by the reports of teachers. Clinical measures indicated that 32% more children in the intervention improved in the primary ADHD outcome measure (43% as compared to 11% in the wait-list condition), and that 41% of the children in this group changed from a moderate or high risk for ADHD behaviours to a non-risk range, with no significant difference in the control group. Parental self-report described a positive change in parenting practices, and independent observations noted significant effects on positive parenting and coaching. These findings suggest that the Incredible Years training is an effective way to reduce ADHD behaviours in young children.
3. *Efficacy of the Incredible Years Programme as an Early Intervention for Children with Conduct Problems and ADHD: Long-Term Follow-Up (Jones et al., 2008)*: This study was designed as a preventative intervention with 79 preschool children displaying signs of ADHD and conduct problems; 50 undergoing the intervention and 29 in a wait-list group. Results indicated statistically significant improvements in ADHD symptoms, with 52% of children in the intervention group showing clinically reliable improvements, as opposed to 21% of the control group. Additional measures included follow-ups at 6, 12, and 18 months. No significant differences were identified from the immediate post-test to any follow-up test, indicating maintenance of clinical improvements over time. Finally, analysis revealed that children with more severe behaviours at pre-test experienced greater benefits from this training programme, providing further support for the effectiveness of this intervention in ameliorating ADHD behaviours and conduct problems in young children.
4. *Effectiveness of the Incredible Years Parenting Program for Families with Socioeconomically Disadvantaged and Ethnic Minority Backgrounds (Leijten et al., 2015)*: This study was concerned with 154 parents of 3 to 8 year-old children in either the Incredible Years parenting intervention or a wait-list control group. Findings included significant reductions in disruptive child behaviour as reported by parents, and in hyperactivity and inattention as reported by teachers. However, parents did not report significant changes in hyperactivity and inattention, and teachers did not report significant changes in disruptive behaviour. There were significant increases in self-reported parental use of praise and incentives, as well as reductions in harsh and inconsistent discipline, but no significant effect on parent-reported use of appropriate discipline techniques, clear expectations, physical punishment, or parenting stress. Importantly, this study also found that these effects did not differ across families with different socioeconomic and ethnic backgrounds, and that they were maintained at a 3-month follow-up, providing evidence that the Incredible Years programme maintains its effectiveness across cultural and economic boundaries and post-intervention time lapses.
5. *Getting with the (Evidence-Based) Program: An Evaluation of the Incredible Years Parenting Training Program in Child Welfare (Marcynyszyn, Maher, & Corwin, 2011)*: This study involved 24 caregivers enrolled in child welfare services, and emphasised the implementation process and qualitative outcomes of the parenting programme. Results indicated that caregivers self-reported statistically significant differences in terms of parenting stress after completion of the intervention, including significantly reduced defensiveness, distress,

dysfunctional parent-child interactions, child difficulty, and total stress. In clinical terms, 56% of caregivers experiencing clinically significant levels of parental distress before the Incredible Years programme was reduced to 25% at post-test. Other significant findings include a 17% reduction in the number of caregivers reporting experiencing child difficulty at clinically high levels and an increase in the likelihood of caregivers responding empathetically to their children. Though this study describes several important challenges to the implementation of the programme (discussed more fully in subsequent sections), participant satisfaction was reported as high. Effects of the programme as reported by group leaders were summarised as follows: “With the adoption of the IY parenting strategies, many parents were ‘more aware of some of the things that they were doing that were defeating their parenting’ and they showed ‘increased acceptance of using positive discipline approaches and understanding [of] the rationale.’ Group leaders also reported that caregivers were able to implement bedtime and mealtime routines, establish stronger emotional connections with their children, and reduce fighting in the home.” It is important to note that developers of the Incredible Years programme were acknowledged as providing conceptual contributions to the manuscript for this study.

Evidence for efficacy:

As mentioned above, Marcynyszyn, Maher, and Corwin (2011) described a number of important challenges to the implementation of the Incredible Years programme that are relevant to an assessment of its efficacy. These identified barriers were combined into four general categories: programme design challenges and adaptations (including time limitations), programme supports (including access to transport, phones, and child care), life stressors (including pregnancy, eviction, and divorce), and cultural competency, which refers to a perceived ethnic and/or class divide between the participants and the Incredible Years programme material. While many of these factors are related to the personal circumstances of the participants and not to the design of the programme, Incredible Years specifically targets populations that are likely to experience such stressors and complications, making such concerns important considerations. However, the perceived ethnic or class divide between the programme materials and the participants is a factor that could affect the success of the programme if it were socially or economically alienating to the programme participants, as highlighted in the 2011 study by Marcynyszyn, Maher, and Corwin. Specifically, the programme was described as lacking diversity in living conditions, socioeconomic status, number of children, and ethnicity. Efforts were made by the developer to rectify these concerns, however, the discrepancies between the portrayed families and the actual participant families reportedly persisted. Again, this is a factor that could negatively impact the efficacy of the programme, although Marcynyszyn, Maher, and Corwin reported significant positive effects on parenting stress with the Incredible Years parenting training, and the study by Leijten et al. (2015) found no significant differences in effects between participants of different socioeconomic or ethnic backgrounds.

Conclusions:

With all of the above taken into consideration, there is significant evidence to support the efficacy of the Incredible Years programme. A large cohort of scientific research has consistently found decreases in disruptive child behaviour and increases in prosocial behaviour, as well as improved parenting practices, with populations as diverse as parents of children diagnosed with or showing early signs of oppositional defiance disorder, attention deficit hyperactivity disorder, and other conduct disorders, foster parents, families involved with Social Services or other child protection agencies, children in Head Start centres, socioeconomically disadvantaged families, and ethnic minorities. Challenges with regards to the implementation of the programme have been described, but given the overwhelming evidence of positive impacts of the Incredible Years training and the generally positive reaction to the programme reported by participants, these concerns may be considered to highlight aspects of the programme that need improving for future implementation, rather than providing evidence against its efficacy. Thus, there exists sufficient evidence to support the use of the Incredible Years programme with a variety of populations facing clinical child behaviour challenges or disadvantages due to socioeconomic factors.

References:

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