Effect of Parent Training vs Parent Education on Behavioral Problems in Children With Autism Spectrum Disorder


SUMMARY: Children with autism spectrum disorder often show disruptive and noncompliance behaviors and many parents may need support as they deal with these behaviors. A 24-week parent training program which provided specific strategies to manage disruptive behaviors was compared to a 24-week parent education program that only provided information about autism. Results revealed that the parent training program was more effective than parent education program in reducing problem behaviors.

KEY FINDINGS:
- At week 24, the Aberrant Behavior Checklist-Irritability subscale declined 47% for the parent training group, and 32% for the parent education group.
- Similarly, the Home Situations Questionnaire declined 55% and 34% for the parent training and parent education groups, respectively.
- About two thirds (69%) of participants in the parent training group gave positive responses about the program, compared to 40% in the parent education group.

IMPLICATIONS FOR MILITARY PROFESSIONALS:
Military professionals could:
- Educate military parents about symptoms of autism spectrum disorder to help them identify symptoms as early as possible
- Provide extra assistance to military children with autism spectrum disorder

IMPLICATIONS FOR PROGRAMS:
Programs could:
- Offer support groups for military parents whose children were diagnosed with autism spectrum disorder
- Design parent training and parent education curricula regarding autism spectrum disorder, and make them accessible to military families

IMPLICATIONS FOR POLICIES:
Policies could:
- Support parent training and parent education programs that can help military parents cope with children’s problem behaviors
- Recommend trainings for professionals who work with military family regarding the early identification of autism spectrum disorder

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METHODS
- Participants were recruited from six sites (e.g., Emory University, University of Pittsburgh).
- Participants were randomly assigned to the parent training group (N = 89) or the parent education group (N = 91); the parent training program provided specific strategies to reduce problem behaviors, whereas the parent education program only provided information about autism but no intervention.
- Each participant was assessed at baseline, every four weeks throughout the program, and after treatment at weeks 36 and 48; the primary outcomes included two questionnaires that assessed children’s disruptive behaviors.

PARTICIPANTS
- The sample included 180 children (86% White, 88% male) with autism spectrum disorder and moderate to severe disruptive behaviors.
- The average age of the children was 4.7 years (age range = 3-7 years, SD = 1.1).
- Children in the parent training and parents education groups were similar in demographics at baseline except for maternal education level.

LIMITATIONS
- The parents were not blinded to treatment assignment, therefore their perspectives may result in a bias in favor of parent training.
- All the treatment outcomes relied on ratings from one source (parents), so the results may be hard to generalize to the classroom.
- It is unclear what child and family characteristics may predict success with the parent training and parent education programs.

AVENUES FOR FUTURE RESEARCH
Future research could:
- Measure children's disruptive and noncompliant behaviors from both parents and teachers to get a thorough understanding
- Identify parent and child characteristics that may predict success with the programs
- Examine the effects of the programs on other aspects of autistic problems, such as social interaction and emotion regulation

ASSESSING RESEARCH THAT WORKS

Design: Excellent Research Plan and Sample
Methods: Appropriate Measurement and Analysis
Limitations: Few

For more information about the Assessing Research that Works rating scale visit:
https://reachmilitaryfamilies.umn.edu/content/assessing-research-that-works