

Clinical effectiveness and cost-effectiveness of parenting interventions for children with severe attachment problems: a systematic review and meta-analysis

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Plain English summary

Parenting interventions for severe attachment problems

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Plain English summary

This review was commissioned to find parental interventions shown in research to improve or prevent severe attachment problems. We found 10,167 research papers on attachment and three teams of reviewers gathered information for the following reviews.

The main systematic review identified 39 parental intervention papers meeting set criteria. Eight interventions for reducing disorganised attachment were meta-analysed and showed good outcomes overall. Most of these focused on improving parental sensitivity. Two papers included an economic evaluation of interventions with data of limited usefulness. A health economics analysis is provided.

Supplementary review 1 explored good ways of assessing attachment at baseline and showed a diverse literature. We identified 35 papers meeting set criteria that examined the development of an assessment tool for attachment patterns or attachment disorders. Scientific measures of their reliability and validity were varied. The two assessment tools compared with the Strange Situation Procedure at the same time had a tendency to identify high rates of false positives and would not be useful clinically. In supplementary review 2, we found eight studies that used a valid disorganised attachment measure or a valid measure of attachment disorder at baseline and followed the children up for at least 10 years. There was an association with emotional and behavioural problems by age 17 years and a weak correlation with personality disorder in young adults.

Helpful future research would include improved study designs and a well-planned large birth cohort study with long-term follow-up and a range of assessments and outcome measures. More intervention research would be productive.

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