

Training teachers in classroom management to improve mental health in primary school children: the STARS cluster RCT

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Plain English summary

The STARS cluster RCT

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Plain English summary

Between 5% and 6% of primary school-aged children, an average of one or two in every class, can be described as having extremely challenging behaviour, which can be difficult for teachers to manage and makes it hard for all children in the class to learn effectively. The Supporting Teachers And childRen in Schools (STARS) trial wanted to know if attending Teacher Classroom Management (TCM) training helped teachers to improve their behaviour-management strategies and if this in turn would lead to better mental health for the children they teach. The trial involved 80 primary school teachers, and their classes, across the south-west of England. Half of the teachers attended TCM training (intervention) and half did not (control). The mental health and behaviour of the children they taught was compared before training started and after it had finished, 9 months later. The children continued to be compared for the next two academic years, at 18 and 30 months from the start of the study. A total of 2075 children aged between 4 and 9 years took part, and teachers reported that they enjoyed the training and found it helpful. Children whose teachers attended the training had slightly better mental health at 9 months than children whose teachers had not attended the training. These differences were not found 18 and 30 months later when the children were taught by different teachers; both sets of children scored similarly. Although the difference found was not large, the children who initially had the worst mental health made bigger improvements in their mental health, and these improvements were still present 30 months later. The children in the intervention arm had better classroom-based behaviour at the 9-, 18- and 30-month comparisons. It was also found that the intervention may be better value for money than teaching as usual, particularly at the 9- and 18-month follow-up points. TCM training should be tested further for primary school teachers but the trial indicated that it would work best if it were to involve all teachers and teaching assistants in a school.

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