

A proportionate, universal parenting programme to enhance social-emotional well-being in infants and toddlers in England: the E-SEE Steps RCT

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Plain English summary

The E-SEE Steps RCT

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Plain English summary

What was the question?

We wanted to help parents to support their child's mental health between the ages of 2 and 20 months. We know that group-based parenting programmes (in which parents meet to discuss issues and learn from each other and group leaders) can work for children aged ≥ 3 years; however, we do not know if they work well for younger children.

What did we do?

We picked a programme to support young children called Incredible Years[®] and compared parents who tried it with those who did not. We asked all parents questions about their health and their child's health at four different time points over 18 months.

Parents who were offered the Incredible Years programme received an Incredible Years baby book to support them with their parenting. When babies were aged 4 months, some parents were offered the Incredible Years infant programme. At 12 months, some parents were offered the Incredible Years toddler programme. An offer to attend these programmes depended on how parents rated their own or their child's mental health.

When children were aged 20 months we compared data from parents who followed the Incredible Years programme with data from those who had not been offered the programme.

What did we find?

We found that the Incredible Years programme did not improve child well-being or significantly improve parent mental health.

Services that delivered the groups, and parents who attended, enjoyed the experience and felt some benefits. However, staff struggled to find the time and capacity to deliver the programme because of high workloads and competing priorities. Not all parents who were offered the programme accepted or turned up.

What does this mean?

Organisations and people who help parents with young children, such as children centre staff or health visitors, need additional support and time to engage parents and to deliver programmes like Incredible Years. The findings of this study suggest that the programme would not improve child well-being.

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