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Study Identifies Effective Parenting Strategies To Reduce Disruptive Behavior in Children

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Are Relationship Enhancement and Behavior Management “The Golden Couple” for Disruptive Child Behavior? Two Meta analyses

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Most parenting programs aim to teach parents how to reduce their children's disruptive behavior. New research looked at more than 150 studies of these programs, finding differences in what works best according to whether or not children already showed behavior problems.

The work was conducted by researchers at the University of Amsterdam, Cardiff University, University of Oxford, and Utrecht University. It appears in the journal *Child Development*, a publication of the Society for Research in Child Development.

"We found that when severely disruptive behavior had already emerged in children, a combination of teaching parents how to manage behavior along with relationship-building strategies was more effective than just teaching parents how to manage behavior," explains Patty Leijten, assistant professor of child development at the University of Amsterdam, who led the study. "However, when disruptive behavior had not yet emerged as a problem, teaching parents both strategies was not more helpful than teaching behavior-management strategies alone."

Severely disruptive behavior was defined as openly uncooperative and hostile behavior, including frequent temper tantrums, excessive arguing with adults, and deliberate attempts to annoy or upset others. Behavior-management strategies include praise to increase positive behavior and negative consequences like timeouts to reduce disruptive behavior. Relationship-building strategies include encouraging parents to be sensitive to their children's needs.

The researchers looked at 156 studies on the effectiveness of parenting programs for reducing disruptive behavior in children ages 2 to10; the studies involved more than 15,000 families from a range of socioeconomic backgrounds in 20 countries. Because the programs varied by whether they taught parents just behavior-management strategies or both relationship-building and behaviormanagement strategies,

the study could compare the effectiveness of these commonly used approaches.

“Policymakers and service providers should be aware that different families may need different strategies to reduce disruptive behavior in children. Programs designed to prevent severe disruptive behavior and to treat severe disruptive behavior may require different approaches,” suggests G.J. Melendez-Torres, senior lecturer in social sciences and health at the University of Cardiff, who coauthored the study. “Adding relationship building to behavior management may benefit children who have not yet developed severe disruptive behavior in other ways, such as encouraging better overall communication between parents and children, but it doesn’t help reduce disruptive behavior in these children. However, for children who have already developed severe disruptive behavior, adding relationship building to behavior management is key to reducing these problems.”

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Summarized from *Child Development*, Are Relationship Enhancement and Behavior Management “The Golden Couple” for Disruptive Child Behavior? Two Meta-Analyses by Leijten, P (now at the University of Amsterdam, formerly and the University of Oxford), Melendez-Torres, GJ (now at Cardiff University, formerly at the University of Warwick), Gardner, F (University of Oxford), van Aar, J (University of Amsterdam), Schulz, S (now at Utrecht University, formerly at the University of Amsterdam), and Overbeek, G (University of Amsterdam). Copyright 2018 The Society for Research in Child Development, Inc. All rights reserved.