

Evaluation of the ESCAPE Parenting Programme

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Aims of the evaluation

In 2003, Young People in Focus, YPF (formerly called TSA) created a parenting programme called ESCAPE, and has since trained many practitioners across the UK to run the course with parents. ESCAPE is a 12 week programme, involving six group sessions and pre- and post-course home visits with parents. ESCAPE aims to improve relationships between young people and their families, and specifically to improve attendance at school, behaviour at home and at school, and reduce offending behaviour.

The scope and methodology of this evaluation has been informed by the recommended standards set by the National Academy of Parenting Practitioners (NAPP) in their PPET ratings for the Commissioners Toolkit as follows:

- A sample size of between 20 and 25 families
- A longitudinal design
- The use of scientifically validated measures
- The inclusion of a variety of ESCAPE groups, in terms of geographical location and different contexts.

Methods and data collected

Seven ESCAPE groups were involved in the evaluation, from across the UK. Data were collected from parents at the start of the course, and again at the end. Measures used included the Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ), the Family Grid, and a range of other quantitative and qualitative items. Data were collected from 40 parents pre-course, and from 32 parents post-course.

Results

The results showed a number of areas of change in parents' perceptions and behaviours between the two data collection points, in addition to parents reporting changes in their child or young person's behaviour. Findings included that at the follow-up:

- Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ) results showed that children were: more considerate of other people's feelings; having less tantrums / hot tempers; kinder to younger children; lying or cheating less; volunteering more to help others; stealing less from home, school or elsewhere; more likely to be getting on better with adults than with children. These were all statistically significant.
- In addition the SDQ results showed
 - a decrease in the total difficulties score
 - a decrease in the conduct problems score
 - an increase in the prosocial behaviour score
 - a decrease in the impact score – this means that the child's problems had less impact on them at T2 in terms of friendships, classroom learning, leisure activities and home life, and how distressed they were by their own problems. These were all statistically significant.
- 55% of parents said that their child's problems were 'a bit' or 'much' better since doing the course
- Family Grid results shows parents' level of self-esteem increased as a result of doing the course – both in relation to their perceptions of themselves as parents, and their perceptions of their child. These were both statistically significant.
- Parents found their child's behaviour less difficult to understand; had increased knowledge about teenage development and behaviour; and felt an increased ability to manage their child's behaviour. These were all statistically significant.
- Parents wanted less help by the end of the course. For example:
 - a reduction from 22% to 9% to those urgently requiring help in relation to communication with their child
 - a reduction from 47% to 3% in those who need urgent help in how they handle arguments with their child
 - a reduction from 41% to 13% in those who need urgent help in how to set boundaries and discipline their child
 - a reduction from 53% to 6% in those who need urgent help in managing difficult behaviour by their child.
- There was a positive finding in relation to one aspect of education. This was the extent to which the child's difficulties impacted on their classroom learning. Those parents saying their child's problems had 'quite a lot' or 'a great deal' of impact on classroom learning reduced from 63% at T1 to 40% at T2.

In addition to these quantitative findings, the qualitative data showed a range of positive outcomes for parents from attending the ESCAPE course. This included improved parent-child communication, parents developing a range of strategies for dealing with difficult issues, two-parent families being more consistent in their parenting strategies, and children having more respect for their parent/s. The majority of parents also said that their household was calmer, there were less arguments between siblings, and more opportunities for family discussion.

In addition, analyses were undertaken comparing parents who dropped out of the study after T1, and those who completed T2 data, in relation to demographic and baseline SDQ data. This showed high levels of similarities, with very few differences in baseline SDQ data. In addition 'intention to treat' analysis was carried out on all 40 participants, comparing T1 and T2 data. This showed that all statistically significant effects were the same. This suggests that the results for the 32 participants who completed the course were very strong, and not affected by those who dropped out.

Conclusions

This small-scale evaluation has demonstrated that the ESCAPE parenting programme has a positive effect on parents, and on their children and young people. Thus the ESCAPE programme met its aim of improving relationships between young people and their families, and improving relationships at home. There were also positive but limited impacts on young people's school attendance and classroom behaviour, and offending.

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