

Last reviewed: July 2016

Intervention website: www.mellowparenting.org

GUIDEBOOK INTERVENTION INFORMATION SHEET

Mellow Toddlers

Please note that in the ‘Intervention Summary’ table below ‘child age’, ‘level of need’, and ‘race and ethnicities’ information is **as evaluated in studies**. Information in other fields describes the intervention as **offered/supported by the intervention provider**.

Intervention summary	
Description	Mellow Toddlers (formerly Mellow Parenting) is a group-based intervention for families where there are concerns about the safety and wellbeing of a child between 0 and 5 years old. It is delivered by two family support workers to groups of up to six parents through 14 weekly sessions lasting five hours each. Prior to these sessions, parents are videotaped interacting with their child in their homes. The videotapes then inform the basis of the content of future sessions.
Evidence rating	2
Cost rating	2
Child outcomes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Preventing crime, violence and antisocial behaviour - Improved child behaviour.
Child age (population characteristic)	1 to 3 years old
Level of need (population characteristic)	Targeted Indicated

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Intervention summary	
Race and ethnicities (population characteristic)	Not reported
Type (model characteristic)	Group
Setting (model characteristic)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Home• Children's Centre• Early years setting.
Workforce (model characteristic)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Family support worker• Health visitor• Early years practitioner.
UK available?	Yes
UK tested?	Yes

Model description

Mellow Toddlers (formerly Mellow parenting) is a group-based intervention for families where there are concerns about the safety and wellbeing of a child between 0 and 5 years old.

It is delivered by two family support workers to groups of up to six parents through 14 weekly sessions lasting five hours each. The intervention can be delivered to mothers and fathers, although they attend 'mothers only' and 'fathers only' groups separately.

Parents are visited in their home twice before the start of the intervention. During the first visit, the Mellow Toddler's goals are explained and discussed within the context of the parents' circumstances.

During the second visit, the practitioner videotapes the parent and child interacting in situations that may be difficult for them – such as mealtimes and bedtimes. The practitioner and parent then choose two positive and two negative examples of the parent and child's interaction to share with the group throughout the course of the intervention.

The group sessions include the following components:

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- In the morning session, parents participate in group discussions where they explore how their personal histories with their own parents are impacting their current relationship with their children. The session included the use of warm-up activities, worksheets (read aloud in case of reading difficulties) and structured discussion. A creche is available for children.
- During the lunch session, parents receive coaching on how to interact with their children and engage in joint activities and singing games.
- In the afternoon session, the practitioners lead a group discussion of videotapes of the parents interacting with their children. Parents are encouraged to identify ‘things that went well’ and ‘things that did not turn out the way you wanted them to’, with practitioners identifying and praising positive parenting strategies. Where mothers share difficult interactions with their children, practitioners put in place strategies to prevent these happening again.
- At the end of the session, ‘have a go’ activities are given to encourage parents to apply what they have learned at home; these are followed up in the next week’s session. In the early weeks, these are set on a group basis, while in later sessions group members set their own targets.
- Parents also receive signposting to other services as required and follow-up sessions are provided as needed.

The sessions provide opportunities for therapeutic work with parents (individually and through group work); direct work on interaction between parents and children; methods to address antecedent and concurrent family risk factors; and direct techniques to change dysfunctional patterns of parent–child interaction. Parent learning is supported through the feedback provided to the videotapes and the ‘have a go!’ homework assignments.

Target population

Age of child	2 to 5 years old
Target population	Families with a child under 5 years facing multiple challenges, including parenting difficulties or relationship problems, child protection issues, family violence, or at least two of the following: child behaviour problems, maternal mental health problems, and difficulties with current or past family relationships.

Please note that the information in this section on target population is as **offered/supported by the intervention provider**.



Theory of change

Why		Who	How	What		
Science-based assumption	Science-based assumption	Science-based assumption	Intervention	Short-term outcomes	Medium-term outcomes	Long-term outcomes
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Attachment security lays the foundation for children to develop positive expectations of themselves and others Attachment security is thought to reduce the risk of mental health problems as children develop. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Sensitive parent–child interactions increase the likelihood of children developing secure attachment relationships Sensitive parenting is supported by their ability to form positive representations of their child. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A parent’s attachment history can negatively impact their representations of their child Negative representations of the child increase the risk of child maltreatment. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Parents receive intensive therapeutic support for their attachment history Parents are supported to form positive representation of themselves and their child Parents are coached to respond sensitively to their child’s needs. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Parents develop positive representations of their child Parents are less likely to have negative representations of their child Parent become more sensitive to their child’s needs. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Improved parent–infant interaction Reduced risk of the child developing an insecure attachment. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Children develop positive expectations of themselves and others Children are at less risk of future mental health problems Children are at less risk of child maltreatment.



Implementation requirements

Who is eligible?	Families where there are identified parenting difficulties or relationship problems, including child protection issues, family violence, or at least two of the following: child behaviour problems, maternal mental health problems, and difficulties with current or past family relationships.
How is it delivered?	Mellow Toddlers is delivered in 14 weekly sessions of five hours' duration each by two practitioners, to groups of six families.
What happens during the intervention?	<p>In the morning session, mothers participate in group discussions where they explore how their personal histories with their own parents are impacting their current relationship with their children.</p> <p>During the lunch session, mothers receive coaching on how to interact with their children and engage in joint activities and singing games.</p> <p>In the afternoon session, the practitioners lead a group discussion of videotapes of the mothers interacting with their children.</p> <p>At the end of the session, 'have a go' activities are given to encourage parents to apply what they have learned at home; these are followed up in the next week's session.</p>
Who can deliver it?	The practitioner who delivers this intervention is a family support worker, early years practitioner or health visitor.
What are the training requirements?	The practitioners have 21 hours of intervention training. Booster training of practitioners is recommended.
How are practitioners supervised?	It is recommended that practitioners are supervised by two host-agency supervisors.
What are the systems for maintaining fidelity?	<p>Intervention fidelity is maintained by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Supervision process.
Is there a licensing requirement?	No



Implementation requirements (cont.)

Contact details	Organisation: Mellow Parenting Email address: enquiries@mellowparenting.org Website: www.mellowparenting.org
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Evidence summary

Mellow Toddler's most rigorous evidence comes from a comparison group study conducted in the UK consistent with Foundations' Level 2 evidence strength criteria.

The study observed statistically significant improvements in Mellow Toddler mothers' reports of their child's behaviour one year following the intervention in comparison to mothers not participating in the intervention. Researchers also observed Mellow Toddler mothers to behave more sensitively and co-operatively towards their child one year following the intervention in comparison to mothers not participating in the intervention. Additionally, Mellow Toddler mothers were significantly more likely to report an improved mental state post-intervention in comparison to mothers in the comparison group.

Mellow Toddlers has preliminary evidence of improving a child outcome, but we cannot be confident that the intervention caused the improvement.

Search and review

	Number of studies
Identified in search	3
Studies reviewed	2
Meeting the L2 threshold	1
Meeting the L3 threshold	0
Contributing to the L4 threshold	0
Ineligible	1



Individual study summary: Study 1

Study 1	
Study design	QED
Country	UK
Sample characteristics	98 families accessing seven family or community centres in Scotland, with a child 0 to 5 years old, where there are identified parenting difficulties or relationship problems, including child protection issues, family violence, or at least two of the following: child behaviour problems, maternal mental health problems, and difficulties with current or past family relationships.
Race, ethnicities, and nationalities	Not reported
Population risk factors	N/A
Timing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Baseline • Post-test • One-year follow-up.
Child outcomes	Improved behaviour
Other outcomes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improved parent–child interaction • Improved maternal mental state.
Study Rating	2
Citations	<p>Study 1a: Puckering, C., Mills, M., Cox, A. D., Maddox, H. & Evans, J. (1999) <i>Improving the quality of family support; Mellow Parenting: An intensive intervention. Final report.</i> Department of Health.</p> <p>Study 1b: Allely, C. S., Puckering, C., Mills, M., Cox, A. D., Evans, J. & Maddox, H. (2014) The impact of the Mellow parenting programme on later measures of childhood verbal IQ. <i>Educational and Child Psychology</i>. 31, 28–37.</p>



Brief summary

Population characteristics

This study involved 98 families accessing seven family or community centres in Scotland, with a child 0 to 5 years old with multiple risks. The mean age of children in the Mellow Toddlers group was 39 months, and in the control group, 36 months. 51% were boys. Families took part in Mellow Toddlers where there are identified parenting difficulties or relationship problems, including child protection issues, family violence, or at least two of the following: child behaviour problems, maternal mental health problems, and difficulties with current or past family relationships. Families were referred by CAMHS, health visitors, social workers, educational psychologists, nursery schools, or family centres.

There was no information on race and ethnicity.

Study design

98 families took part in this QED study: 69 were in the Mellow Toddler group, and 29 in the comparison group. At baseline, there were differences between the groups in: proportion of mothers who experienced physical or sexual abuse in early life, the mother's mental state in last three months, and the number of emotional or behavioural problems experienced by the child.

The comparison group were recruited from three family centres, also in Scotland, which were not offering Mellow Parenting at the time, but, like those centres in the Mellow Parenting group, were offering services including day care, parenting courses, art and cooking groups, and family counselling.

Measurement

Assessments took place at baseline, post-intervention, and one-year follow-up.

- **Parent report** measures included the Richman Child Behaviour Rating Scale and the Parental Hassle Scale.
- **Researcher-led** assessments included the Mellow Parenting Coding System.

Some assessments took place only at baseline and one-year follow up:

- **Researcher-led** assessments included the Wechsler Preschool and Primary Scale of Intelligence (WPPSI) and the Vineland Social Maturity Scale.

Study retention

Post-intervention and one-year follow-up

84% (82) of families participated in post-intervention and one-year follow-up assessment, representing 78% (54) Mellow Toddler families, and 97% (28) comparison group families.



Results

Data-analytic strategy

ANOVAs with group x time interaction were used to compare the groups on continuous variables, and chi squared tests were used to compare the groups on dichotomous variables.

Findings

The study observed statistically significant benefits favouring Mellow Toddler children, including child behaviour, and parent–child interaction. It also observed improvements in child IQ, but this was with a small sample, meaning that the finding cannot be taken as having preliminary evidence at Foundations’ Level 2 threshold.

There were also positive parenting outcomes, including warmth and stimulation.

Limitations

The conclusions that can be drawn from this study are limited by differences between the groups at baseline, a lack of intent-to-treat analysis, and the fact the analysis does not take into account the level of assignment (family centre).

Study 1: Outcomes table

Outcome	Measure	Effect size	Statistical significance	Number of participants	Measurement time point
Child outcomes					
Communication	Vineland Communication Domain (researcher-led assessment)	N/A	No	82	One-year follow-up
Socialisation	Vineland Socialisation Domain (researcher-led assessment)	N/A	No	82	One-year follow-up
IQ	WPPSI Performance (researcher-led assessment)	N/A	No	31	One-year follow-up



Outcome	Measure	Effect size	Statistical significance	Number of participants	Measurement time point
IQ	WPPSI Verbal (researcher-led assessment)	N/A	No	31	One-year follow-up
IQ	WPPSI – full scale (researcher-led assessment)	N/A	Yes *	31	One-year follow-up
Behaviour	Richman Child Behaviour Rating Scale (parent report)	N/A	Yes	82	Post-intervention / One-year follow-up
Parent outcomes					
Maternal wellbeing	Maternal mental state (researcher-led assessment)	N/A	Yes	82	Post-intervention
Parenting stress	Parental Hassle Scale (parent report)	N/A	No	82	Post-intervention / One-year follow-up
Positive Anticipation	Mellow Parenting Coding Scheme (researcher-led assessment)	N/A	No	82	Post-intervention / One-year follow-up
Positive Autonomy	Mellow Parenting Coding Scheme (researcher-led assessment)	N/A	No	82	Post-intervention / One-year follow-up



Outcome	Measure	Effect size	Statistical significance	Number of participants	Measurement time point
Negative Autonomy	Mellow Parenting Coding Scheme (researcher-led assessment)	N/A	No	82	Post-intervention / One-year follow-up
Positive co-operation	Mellow Parenting Coding Scheme (researcher-led assessment)	N/A	Yes	82	Post-intervention / One-year follow-up
Negative co-operation	Mellow Parenting Coding Scheme (researcher-led assessment)	N/A	No	82	Post-intervention / One-year follow-up
Positive distress	Mellow Parenting Coding Scheme (researcher-led assessment)	N/A	No	82	Post-intervention / One-year follow-up
Negative distress	Mellow Parenting Coding Scheme (researcher-led assessment)	N/A	No	82	Post-intervention / One-year follow-up
Positive warmth & stimulation	Mellow Parenting Coding Scheme (researcher-led assessment)	N/A	Yes	82	Post-intervention / One-year follow-up
Negative warmth & stimulation	Mellow Parenting Coding Scheme (researcher-led assessment)	N/A	Yes	82	Post-intervention / One-year follow-up



Outcome	Measure	Effect size	Statistical significance	Number of participants	Measurement time point
Inappropriate Response	Mellow Parenting Coding Scheme (researcher-led assessment)	N/A	No	82	Post-intervention / One-year follow-up
Time in Control	Mellow Parenting Coding Scheme (researcher-led assessment)	N/A	Yes	82	Post-intervention / One-year follow-up
Negativity in Control	Mellow Parenting Coding Scheme (researcher-led assessment)	N/A	Yes	82	Post-intervention / One-year follow-up
Time in Good Involvement	Mellow Parenting Coding Scheme (researcher-led assessment)	N/A	No	82	Post-intervention / One-year follow-up
* The sample size for this outcome is below the threshold for inclusion on the Foundations Guidebook.					

Other studies

The following studies were identified for this intervention but did not count towards the intervention's overall evidence rating. An intervention receives the same rating as its most robust study or studies.

Macbeth, A., Law, J., McGowan, I., Norrie, J., Thompsons, L. & Wilson, P. (2015) Mellow Parenting: Systematic review and meta-analysis of an intervention to promote sensitive parenting. *Developmental Medicine and Child Neurology*. 57 (12), 1119–28.

Puckering, C., Rogers, J., Mills, M., Cox, A. D. & Mattsson-Graff, M. (1994) Process and evaluation of a group intervention for mothers with parenting difficulties. *Child Abuse Review*. 3, 299–310.

Note on provider involvement: This provider has agreed to Foundations' terms of reference (or the Early Intervention Foundation's terms of reference), and the assessment has been conducted and published with the full cooperation of the intervention provider.