

Last reviewed: September 2024

Intervention website: <https://www.parentplus.co.uk/parents-plus-programmes/the-special-needs-programme-training-for-professionals/>

GUIDEBOOK INTERVENTION INFORMATION SHEET

Parents Plus Special Needs

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	Parents Plus Special Needs Programme (PPSN) is for parents of a child between the ages of 11 and 25 years old with an intellectual disability. It is typically delivered by two facilitators to groups of up to eight parents through seven 2.5-hour sessions over a period of 6 to 10 weeks. During the sessions, parents learn strategies for supporting their disabled child’s needs, improving family wellbeing, and managing their own needs and life balance.
Evidence rating	3
Cost rating	1
Child outcomes	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Preventing crime, violence and antisocial behaviour- Improved behaviour.
Child age (population characteristic)	11 to 25 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">• Community centre• Outpatient setting.
Workforce (model characteristic)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Psychologists• Mental health professionals.
UK available?	Yes
UK tested?	No

Model description

Parents Plus Special Needs Programme (PPSN) is one of eight Parents Plus! interventions adapted specifically for families with a child between 11 and 25 years old with an intellectual disability. The child's disability may be mild, moderate, or severe and may be present with additional diagnoses, such as autism spectrum disorder (ASD) or a physical disability.

The Parents Plus Special Needs Programme (PPSN) consists of seven sessions which are delivered over a six to 12-week period to parents individually and in small groups. PPSN is designed to be delivered in disability and community settings with the aim of connecting parents to other parents and strengthening their links to the community. By supporting parents, PPSN aims to also improve the wellbeing of their intellectually disabled child.

PPSN typically begins with a pre-intervention 45-minute introductory meeting conducted with parents individually, and parents receive a book covering PPSN's key learning principles, strategies, worksheets, and exercises. The seven group sessions then follow, and are organised around three pillars: supporting families, supporting children, and parent self-care. Topics include what it is like to raise a child with special needs, how to best connect with a special needs child, strategies for communicating with a special needs child, the impact of a child's disability on parent relationship, establishing routines, and the impact on siblings. Topics are discussed among the

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group, with parents having the opportunity to engage in discussions with clinicians and other parents.

The intervention concludes with a follow-up group session occurring three to six months after the seventh session is complete.

Target population

Age of child	11 to 25 years old
Target population	Children and young people who have an intellectual disability and may also have an additional diagnosis.

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"> • The transition to adolescence and adulthood can be particularly challenging for children with an intellectual disability • Biological and school-based changes often contribute to increases in social, emotional, and behavioural difficulties during the adolescent years. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The challenges associated with adolescent development are often stressful for parents with a disabled child <p>Effective parenting practices can reduce the stress families with a special needs adolescent often experience.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It is not uncommon for support for families with a disabled child to decrease during the adolescent years • Increasing the support available to parents with a disabled adolescent child will likely reduce parental stress and improve family functioning. 	<p>Parents learn strategies for:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Supporting sibling and parent relationships in the family • Building self-esteem and wellbeing • Managing adolescent behaviours that challenge • Understanding puberty, sexuality, and relationships • Advocating for their child's needs • Preparing their child for adulthood and future transitions. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reductions in parental stress • Improved parental confidence • Improved parenting behaviours • Increased family wellbeing • Increased support from the community. 	<p>Reduced adolescent emotional and behavioural problems.</p>	<p>Increased child wellbeing during adolescence and adulthood.</p>



Implementation requirements

Who is eligible?	Parents of children and young people aged between 11 and 25 years old who have an intellectual disability and may also have an additional diagnosis.
How is it delivered?	PPSN is delivered in six to 12 sessions of 2 to 2.5 hours' duration each by two trained practitioners, to groups of up to eight families.
What happens during the intervention?	<p>PPSN supports parents to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Manage behaviour and emotional problems • Deal with puberty, sexuality, and relationships • Reduce their own stress as parents • Support all relationships in the family • Build self-esteem and confidence • Advocate for their child or adolescent • Support education and development • Prepare their child for adulthood and future transitions. <p>Every parent receives a parent book that includes key learning principles, strategies, worksheets, and exercises. Topics are discussed among the group, with parents having the opportunity to engage in discussions with clinicians and other parents.</p>
Who can deliver it?	The practitioners who deliver this intervention are professionally qualified multidisciplinary team members working in the disability sector such as psychologists, social workers, behaviour therapists, support workers, nurses, occupational therapists, speech and language therapists, physiotherapists, family service managers, and advocacy workers.
What are the training requirements?	The practitioners have 14 hours of intervention training. Booster training of practitioners is recommended.
How are practitioners supervised?	It is recommended that practitioners are supervised by one trained Parents Plus supervisor/trainer.
What are the systems for maintaining fidelity?	<p>Intervention fidelity is maintained through the following processes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Training manual • Other online material • Face-to-face training • Fidelity monitoring.



Implementation requirements (cont.)

Is there a licensing requirement?	Yes
*Contact details	<p>Contact person: Dr Eileen Brosnan</p> <p>Organisation: Parents Plus</p> <p>Email address: eileen@parentsplus.ie</p> <p>Website: https://www.parentsplus.co.uk/parents-plus-programmes/the-special-needs-programme-training-for-professionals/</p> <p>*Please note that this information may not be up to date. In this case, please visit the listed intervention website for up to date contact details.</p>

Evidence summary

Parents Plus Special Needs' most rigorous evidence comes from a single RCT conducted in Ireland consistent with Foundations' Level 3 evidence strength threshold.

This study observed statistically significant improvements in parents' reports of their child's behaviour, as well as improved parenting practices, self-confidence, and satisfaction as a parent in comparison to the reports of parents not receiving the intervention.

Parents Plus Special Needs can be described as evidence-based: it has evidence from at least one rigorously conducted RCT or QED demonstrating a statistically significant positive impact on at least one child outcome.



Search and review

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

Individual study summary: Study 1

Study 1	
Study design	Cluster RCT
Country	Ireland
Sample characteristics	277 families across 24 intellectual disability services
Race, ethnicities, and nationalities	Not reported
Population risk factors	All participants had been diagnosed with an intellectual disability (40% mild, 48% moderate, and 13% severe). 84% of the sample had an additional comorbidity including Autism (57% of the sample) and Down's syndrome (26% of the sample).
Timing	Measurement occurred at baseline and post-intervention (seven weeks after baseline)



Study 1	
Child outcomes	Reduction in problem behaviour (parent report)
Other outcomes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Parenting practices (parent report) • Parental self-confidence (parent report) • Parental satisfaction (parent report).
Study Rating	3
Citation	McMahon, S. M. (2023) Parents Plus parenting programme for parents of adolescents with intellectual disabilities: A cluster randomised controlled trial. <i>Journal of Applied Research in Intellectual Disabilities</i> . 36, 871–880.

Brief summary

Population characteristics

This study involved 277 families living in Ireland, with a child aged 9 to 25 years old with an intellectual disability. 69% were boys. 84% of the sample had an additional comorbidity including Autism (57% of the sample) and Down's syndrome (26% of the sample).

Participants were eligible if they were parents of a child or adolescent between 9 and 25 years old with an intellectual disability and were registered service users of the disability service.

Study design

12 disability services, including 141 participants, were randomly assigned to the Parents Plus Special Needs intervention group and 12 services were assigned to a wait-list control. One of the wait-list services dropped out prior to the study commencing, leaving 136 participants across 11 services in the wait-list control. The wait-list control group received the intervention after follow-up measures were completed.

The sample was not equivalent at baseline on a variety of measures and demographic characteristics, including child age, parenting practices and child behavioural measures, and severity of intellectual disability. The study controls for most but not all of these baseline differences.



Measurement

Measurement took place at baseline and at post-intervention, seven weeks after baseline. The intervention group also completed the same measures three months after the post-intervention measure. The same measures were administered at each timepoint. All measures were completed by parents.

- Parenting and Family Adjustment Scale (PAFAS)
- Child Adjustment and Parent Efficacy Scale – Developmental Disability (CAPES-DD)
- Kansas Parental Satisfaction Scale (KPSS).

Study retention

77% (213) of parents participated in post-intervention assessment, representing 80% (113) of intervention participants and 74% (100) of control participants. This makes the overall attrition 23%, with the differential attrition being 6%. There were no significant differences between the completers and attrited participants across any of the measures at baseline. However, there were some significant differences between groups within the retained sample at baseline measurement.

55% (78) of the intervention group also completed measures at a three-month follow-up.

Results

Data-analytic strategy

The study used an intention-to-treat analysis, using imputation for missing data at the post-intervention measurement, assuming no change from baseline. Mixed within-between analyses of covariance and analyses of variance were conducted with time x group interactions. Significant interaction results were followed up with t-tests to determine the nature of the significance. The authors also provided an alternative analysis using mixed linear modelling, to account for the cluster level, which yielded the same results.

The results from the three-month follow-up were subject to a completer analysis, looking for change over time between all three timepoints.

Findings

The study observed an effect of Parents Plus Special Needs in reducing children's problem behaviour, compared to the control group. The pre–post change in the intervention group for problem behaviour had an effect size of $d = 0.4$, indicating a moderate effect.

The study also observed a significant positive effect of the intervention on parenting practices, parental satisfaction, and parental self-confidence, compared to the control group.

The participants also completed measures of attainment of target behaviours (goals) for themselves and their child. These measures (the Parent Plus Goal Form) are not validated and so not reported in the outcomes table. However, analysis did find a significant time by group interaction effect for



both parent and child goals. Parents in the intervention group moved significantly closer to achieving their parenting goals and the control group remained the same. For child goals, both intervention and control groups moved significantly closer to achieving their goal; however, the intervention group had a large effect size whereas the control group had a small effect size.

Study 1: Outcomes table

Outcome	Measure	Effect size	Statistical significance	Number of participants	Measurement time point
Child outcomes					
Problem behaviour	Child Adjustment and Parent Efficacy Scale – Developmental Disability (CAPES-DD) – problem behaviour subscale (parent report)	$\eta^2p = 0.02^*$	Yes	276	Post-intervention
Emotional problems	Child Adjustment and Parent Efficacy Scale – Developmental Disability (CAPES-DD) – emotional problems subscale (parent report)	N/A	No		Post-intervention
Prosocial behaviour	Child Adjustment and Parent Efficacy Scale – Developmental Disability (CAPES-DD) – prosocial behaviour subscale (parent report)	$\eta^2p = 0.02$	Yes**	266	Post-intervention



Outcome	Measure	Effect size	Statistical significance	Number of participants	Measurement time point
Parent outcomes					
Parenting practices	Parenting and Family Adjustment Scale (PAFAS) – Parenting practices subscale (parent report)	$\eta^2p = 0.07$	Yes	277	Post-intervention
Family adjustment	Parenting and Family Adjustment Scale (PAFAS) – Family adjustment subscale (parent report)	N/a	No		Post-intervention
Parental self-confidence	Child Adjustment and Parent Efficacy Scale – Developmental Disability (CAPES-DD) – self-efficacy subscale (parent report)	$\eta^2p = 0.05$	Yes	236	Post-intervention
Parental satisfaction	Kansas Parental Satisfaction Scale (KPSS) (parent report)	$\eta^2p = 0.08$	Yes	277	Post-intervention
<p>* The effect sizes reported here are from analyses which are not adjusted for cluster level.</p> <p>** The differences between groups were too large at baseline for the prosocial behaviour measure, and exceed the thresholds for Foundations' Level 3 evidence strength criteria, and so this outcome is excluded from the reported outcomes.</p>					



Other studies

No other studies were identified for Parents Plus Special Needs.

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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.