

# EVIDENCE ANNEX

## Practice Guide on parenting disabled children & young people, and those with special educational needs (SEN)

### Introduction

The following annex sets out the evidence underpinning each of the six recommendations specified in the Parenting Disabled Children & Young People Practice Guide. Influenced by our evidence toolkit standards, the table pulls out the key methodological information, which defines the strength of evidential certainty behind our recommendations.

We also provide the evidence underpinning the Practice Guide's key principles, as well as providing recommendations for further research and testing in England. A reference list of evidenced studies can be found at the end of this document.

Note that the evidence underpinning the Practice Guide is based on findings from an umbrella review of 106 systematic reviews, meta-analyses, meta-regression, and meta-synthesis.

To conduct the meta-analyses and meta-regression, we extracted 213 randomised controlled trials (RCTs) included in the 106 systematic reviews identified in the umbrella review. The researchers also extracted information about the individual RCTs, such as sample size and risk of bias assessment ratings. The recommendations presented in the Guide are based on findings from the meta-analyses component of the evidence review.



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Go to the Parenting Disabled Children & Young People Practice Guide:  
[foundations.org.uk/toolkit/practice-guides/parenting-disabled-children-and-young-people](https://foundations.org.uk/toolkit/practice-guides/parenting-disabled-children-and-young-people)

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# Evidence underpinning the recommendations

Recommendation	Outcome assessed	No. of studies included in meta-analysis	Characteristics of the participants of the studies included in meta-analysis  Minimum sample stated as some of the studies did not report sample size.	Effect size & 95% confidence intervals	Risk of bias rating of studies  For each of the meta-analysis conducted, sensitivity analysis showed that the results were consistent after excluding high risk of bias studies and those without a risk of bias rating.	Heterogeneity	Strength of evidence rating	Summary of findings
<p><b>1:</b> Offer evidence-based parenting support when an autistic child shows behaviours that challenge parent carer(s), to support them to manage challenging behaviours and promote the child's social and interaction skills.</p>	<p>Child behaviour</p>	<p>119 randomised controlled trials (RCTs)</p>	<p>6107 families with autistic children aged 0-15 years old. This includes children without a diagnosis but are showing potentially similar characteristics of autism.</p>	<p>0.47 (0.39-0.55)</p>	<p>Low risk: 15 Moderate/unclear: 15 High risk: 54 Not reported: 35</p>	<p>81.5%</p>	<p>Strong</p>	<p>Findings from a meta-analysis involving 119 RCTs show that evidence-based parenting programmes are effective in supporting parent carers of autistic children to promote child social and interaction skills. Examples of effective programmes include the Social ABCs, the Transporters, the Parent–Child Interaction Therapy (PCIT), and the Pre-School Autism Communication Trial (PACT).</p>
<p><b>1:</b> Offer evidence-based parenting support when an autistic child shows behaviours that challenge parent carer(s), to support them to manage challenging</p>	<p>Child social skills and interaction</p>	<p>22 RCTs</p>	<p>1289 families with autistic children aged up to 15 years old. The sample also included children without a formal diagnosis but are showing potentially</p>	<p>0.42 (0.23-0.62)</p>	<p>Low risk: 4 Moderate/unclear: 6 High risk: 9 Not reported: 3</p>	<p>64.9%</p>	<p>Strong</p>	<p>The meta-analysis of 22 RCTs found that evidence-based parenting programmes are effective in supporting parent carers to manage behaviours that challenge in autistic children.</p>



Recommendation	Outcome assessed	No. of studies included in meta-analysis	Characteristics of the participants of the studies included in meta-analysis Minimum sample stated as some of the studies did not report sample size.	Effect size & 95% confidence intervals	Risk of bias rating of studies For each of the meta-analysis conducted, sensitivity analysis showed that the results were consistent after excluding high risk of bias studies and those without a risk of bias rating.	Heterogeneity	Strength of evidence rating	Summary of findings
behaviours and promote the child's social and interaction skills.			similar characteristics of autism.					
<b>2:</b> Offer evidence-based parenting support to parent carers of autistic children, or children with primary and secondary language impairment, to improve language and communication	Child language and communication	45 RCTs	1461 families with autistic children or children with language impairment aged 1 to 6 years old.	0.36 (0.26-0.47)	Low risk: 5 Moderate/unclear: 3 High risk: 17 Not reported: 20	38.4%	Strong	Findings from a meta-analysis of 45 RCTs showed that evidence-based parenting programmes are effective in improving language and communication among autistic children and those with language impairment. Examples of effective programmes include the Parent-mediated Early Start Denver Model (P-ESDM), Social ABCs, PCIT and PACT.
<b>3:</b> Offer evidence-based parenting support to parent carers of autistic children, and children with brain injury, ADHD, hearing loss, or intellectual disability, to improve	Parent-Child interaction	30 RCTs	2732 families with autistic children and children with ADHD, hearing loss, or intellectual disability, aged 0 to 12 years old. This also included families with	0.40 (0.20-0.61)	Low risk: 7 Moderate/unclear: 5 High risk: 15 Not reported: 3	81.8%	Strong	The meta-analysis showed that for families of autistic children and those with children with ADHD, hearing loss and intellectual disability, evidence-based parenting programmes are effective in improving parent child interaction. Examples



Recommendation	Outcome assessed	No. of studies included in meta-analysis	Characteristics of the participants of the studies included in meta-analysis Minimum sample stated as some of the studies did not report sample size.	Effect size & 95% confidence intervals	Risk of bias rating of studies For each of the meta-analysis conducted, sensitivity analysis showed that the results were consistent after excluding high risk of bias studies and those without a risk of bias rating.	Heterogeneity	Strength of evidence rating	Summary of findings
parent-child interaction			children who have not been formally diagnosed but are showing potentially similar characteristics of autism, ADHD, hearing loss, or intellectual disability.					of effective programmes include the New Forest Parenting Programme (NFPP), Incredible Years Pre-School, and Primary Care Stepping Stones Tripple P (PCSSTP).
<b>4:</b> Offer evidence-based parenting support to parent carers of autistic children and children with language impairment, or intellectual disability, to reduce parental stress.	Parental stress	29 RCTs	1409 families with autistic children and those with children with language impairment, or intellectual disabilities, aged 1 to 11 years old.	0.39 (0.24-0.52)	Low risk: 10 Moderate/unclear: 6 High risk: 10 Not reported: 3	60.5%	Strong	Findings from a meta-analysis of 29 RCTs showed that evidence-based parenting programmes are effective in promoting positive parenting and reducing parental stress among families with autistic children and children with language impairment and intellectual disabilities. Examples of effective programmes include the Parent Plus Early Years Programme, PACT, PCIT, P-ESDM, and the Social ABCs.
<b>5:</b> Offer evidence-based parenting	Parenting practices	34 RCTs	2661 families of autistic children	0.52 (0.31-0.74)	Low risk: 8 Moderate/unclear: 3	85.7%	Strong	The meta-analysis of 34 RCTs found that evidence-



Recommendation	Outcome assessed	No. of studies included in meta-analysis	Characteristics of the participants of the studies included in meta-analysis  Minimum sample stated as some of the studies did not report sample size.	Effect size & 95% confidence intervals	Risk of bias rating of studies  For each of the meta-analysis conducted, sensitivity analysis showed that the results were consistent after excluding high risk of bias studies and those without a risk of bias rating.	Heterogeneity	Strength of evidence rating	Summary of findings
support to parent carers of autistic children and children with ADHD, to promote positive parenting practices, improve parental wellbeing, and the characteristics of the child's condition			and children with ADHD aged up to 11 years old. This includes those without a diagnosis but are showing potentially similar characteristics of autism or ADHD.		High risk: 15 Not reported: 8			based parenting programmes are effective in promoting positive parenting practices among families with autistic children and those with children with ADHD. Effective programmes include NFPP, Incredible Years, and PCIT.
<b>5:</b> Offer evidence-based parenting support to parent carers of autistic children and children with ADHD, to promote positive parenting practices, improve parental wellbeing, and the characteristics of the child's condition	Parental wellbeing	26 RCTs	1188 families with autistic children and children with ADHD aged up to 11 years old. This includes those without a diagnosis but are showing potentially similar characteristics of autism or ADHD.	0.34 (0.13-0.55)	Low risk: 3 Moderate/unclear: 6 High risk: 15 Not reported: 2	67.9%	Strong	Findings from a meta-analysis of 26 RCTs show that evidence-based parenting programmes are effective in improving parental wellbeing among families with autistic children and those with children with ADHD. Examples of effective programmes include PACT, the Social ABCs, and P-ESDM.
<b>5:</b> Offer evidence-based parenting support to parent carers of autistic children and children	Characteristics of the child's condition	70 RCTs	5038 families with autistic children and children with ADHD aged up to 11 years old. This	0.34 (0.25-0.44)	Low risk:7 Moderate/unclear:11 High risk: 49 Not reported: 3	55.4%	Strong	A meta-analysis of 70 RCTs found that evidence-based parenting programmes are effective in improving the overall characteristics of



Recommendation	Outcome assessed	No. of studies included in meta-analysis	Characteristics of the participants of the studies included in meta-analysis  Minimum sample stated as some of the studies did not report sample size.	Effect size & 95% confidence intervals	Risk of bias rating of studies  For each of the meta-analysis conducted, sensitivity analysis showed that the results were consistent after excluding high risk of bias studies and those without a risk of bias rating.	Heterogeneity	Strength of evidence rating	Summary of findings
with ADHD, to promote positive parenting practices, improve parental wellbeing, and the characteristics of the child's condition			includes those without a diagnosis but are showing potentially similar characteristics of autism or ADHD.					autism and ADHD. Examples of effective programmes include NFPP, Incredible Years, and PCIT.
<b>6:</b> Offer evidence-based parenting support to parent carers of autistic children and children with cerebral palsy or acquired brain injury, to improve child development, cognitive skills, and emotional and psychological wellbeing	Child development and cognitive skills	19 RCTs	1094 families with autistic children and children with cerebral palsy or acquired brain injury, aged 3 to 17 years old.	0.30 (0.10-0.53)	Low risk: 2 Moderate/unclear: 4 High risk: 4 Not reported: 1	63.9%	Good	Findings from a meta-analysis of 19 RCTs show that evidence-based parenting programmes can improve child development and cognitive skills among autistic children and children with cerebral palsy or acquired brain injury. Examples of effective programmes include the Counsellor-Assisted Problem-Solving (CAPS) programme and I-InTERACT.
<b>6:</b> Offer evidence-based parenting support to parent carers of autistic children and children with cerebral palsy or	Child emotional and psychological wellbeing	11 RCTs	816 families with autistic children and children with cerebral palsy or acquired brain	0.33 (0.13-0.53)	Low risk: 2 Moderate/unclear: 4 High risk: 4 Not reported: 1	43.1%	Good	A meta-analysis of 11 RCTs found that evidence-based parenting programmes are effective in improving emotional and psychological wellbeing of autistic children



<b>Recommendation</b>	<b>Outcome assessed</b>	<b>No. of studies included in meta-analysis</b>	<b>Characteristics of the participants of the studies included in meta-analysis</b> Minimum sample stated as some of the studies did not report sample size.	<b>Effect size &amp; 95% confidence intervals</b>	<b>Risk of bias rating of studies</b> For each of the meta-analysis conducted, sensitivity analysis showed that the results were consistent after excluding high risk of bias studies and those without a risk of bias rating.	<b>Heterogeneity</b>	<b>Strength of evidence rating</b>	<b>Summary of findings</b>
acquired brain injury, to improve child development, cognitive skills, and emotional and psychological wellbeing			injury, aged 0 to 17 years old.					and those with cerebral palsy and acquired brain injury. Examples of effective programmes include the Family-Implemented TEACCH for Toddlers (FITT), CAPS, and I-InTERACT.



## Evidence underpinning the key principles

Key principle	Systematic review finding	Supporting studies	Confidence in finding (CERQual)
<b>1:</b> Implement different types of support to develop a mixed local offer that is responsive to the identified needs of families in the local area.	1.2: There isn't one size fits all; different types of parenting interventions will suit different carers' needs.	The finding was informed by 106 qualitative studies.	High: This finding was graded as high confidence because of the richness of the data, and there were only moderate concerns regarding methodological limitations.
	1.3: Parents and carers appreciate having a sense of a shared experience with others, and sharing their own experiences, leading to feeling 'normal' or less stigmatised.	The finding was informed by 59 qualitative studies.	High: This finding was graded as high confidence because of the richness of the data, and there were only moderate concerns regarding methodological limitations.
	2.3: Parents and carers perceive that some interventions are not a good fit for their needs or context and that practitioners might offer inadequate support.	The finding was informed by 78 qualitative studies.	High: This finding was graded as high confidence because of the richness of the data, and there were only moderate concerns regarding methodological limitations.
	2.4: Some parents and carers struggle with different facets of the group format, for different reasons.	The finding was informed by 20 qualitative studies.	Moderate: This finding was graded as moderate confidence because of the data relevance and coherence. However, there were concerns about methodological limitations and richness of detail in the studies included.
<b>2:</b> The local parenting offer should be coordinated with the formal and informal support networks around the child or young person	1.5: Interventions are perceived to work better if the wider family and network get involved.	The finding was informed by 31 qualitative studies.	Moderate: This finding was graded as moderate confidence because of the data relevance and coherence. However, there were concerns about methodological limitations and richness of detail in the studies included.
	2.5: Parenting interventions are limited when other services or wider	The finding was informed by 31 qualitative studies.	Moderate: This finding was graded as moderate confidence because of the data relevance and coherence. However, there were concerns about



Key principle	Systematic review finding	Supporting studies	Confidence in finding (CERQual)
	network are not cooperative or 'work against' them.		methodological limitations and richness of detail in the studies included.
<b>3:</b> Parent carers of disabled children and young people should experience effective, empowering and non-stigmatising parenting support.	1.3: Parents and carers appreciate having a sense of a shared experience with others, and also sharing their own experiences, leading to feeling 'normal' or less stigmatised.	The finding was informed by 59 qualitative studies.	High: This finding was graded as high confidence because of the richness of the data, and there were only moderate concerns regarding methodological limitations.
	1.4: Parents and carers appreciate being cared for by practitioners or peers and also appreciate opportunities to take care of themselves.	The finding was informed by 66 qualitative studies.	High: This finding was graded as high confidence because of the richness of the data, and there were only moderate concerns regarding methodological limitations.
	2.2: Parenting interventions can be scary for carers at first, as they may be asked to engage with unfamiliar activities.	The finding was informed by 37 qualitative studies.	Moderate: This finding was graded as moderate confidence because of the data relevance and coherence. However, there were concerns about methodological limitations and richness of detail in the studies included.
	2.3: Parents and carers perceive that some interventions are not a good fit for their needs or context and that practitioners might offer inadequate support.	The finding was informed by 78 qualitative studies.	High: This finding was graded as high confidence because of the richness of the data, and there were only moderate concerns regarding methodological limitations.
	3.1: Parents and carers appreciate changes in themselves, even when the intervention is focused on tackling the child's problems and	The finding was informed by 96 qualitative studies.	High: This finding was graded as high confidence because of the richness of the data, and there were only moderate concerns regarding methodological limitations.



Key principle	Systematic review finding	Supporting studies	Confidence in finding (CERQual)
	difficulties and pass the changes onward.		
<b>4:</b> Parenting support should be accessible, flexible and sensitive to parent carers' needs. Practice should be adapted to overcome barriers to access.	1:1 Practical accessibility and convenience factors play an important role in facilitating acceptability and engagement.	The finding was informed by 53 qualitative studies.	High: This finding was graded as high confidence because of the richness of the data, and there were only moderate concerns regarding methodological limitations.
	1.2: There isn't one size fits all; different types of parenting interventions will suit different carers' needs.	The finding was informed by 106 qualitative studies.	High: This finding was graded as high confidence because of the richness of the data, and there were only moderate concerns regarding methodological limitations.
	2.1: Parents and carers frequently face practical and logistical difficulties when attending and engaging with parenting interventions.	The finding was informed by 67 qualitative studies.	High: This finding was graded as high confidence because of the richness of the data, and there were only moderate concerns regarding methodological limitations.
<b>5:</b> Consider the role of family members and other caregivers in building a consistent and sustainable network of support around the disabled child or young person	1.5: Interventions are perceived to work better if the wider family and network get involved.	The finding was informed by 31 qualitative studies.	Moderate: This finding was graded as moderate confidence because of the data relevance and coherence. However, there were concerns about methodological limitations and richness of detail in the studies included.
	2.1: Parents and carers frequently face practical and logistical difficulties when attending and engaging with parenting interventions.	The finding was informed by 67 qualitative studies.	High: This finding was graded as high confidence because of the richness of the data, and there were only moderate concerns regarding methodological limitations.
	2.5: Parenting interventions are limited when other services or wider	The finding was informed by 31 qualitative studies.	Moderate: This finding was graded as moderate confidence because of the data relevance and coherence. However, there were concerns about



Key principle	Systematic review finding	Supporting studies	Confidence in finding (CERQual)
	network are not cooperative or 'work against' them.		methodological limitations and richness of detail in the studies included.
	3.3: Changes in parents and children tended to affect family dynamics in positive ways, although some struggles were identified.	The finding was informed by 55 qualitative studies.	High: This finding was graded as high confidence because of the richness of the data, and there were only moderate concerns regarding methodological limitations.
6: Adopt a holistic approach to parenting support by considering the needs of parent carers and encouraging opportunities for self-care and reflection	1.4: Parents and carers appreciate being cared for by practitioners or peers and also appreciate opportunities to take care of themselves.	The finding was informed by 66 qualitative studies.	High: This finding was graded as high confidence because of the richness of the data, and there were only moderate concerns regarding methodological limitations.
	3.1: Parents and carers appreciate changes in themselves, even when the intervention is focused on tackling the child's problems and difficulties and pass the changes onward.	The finding was informed by 96 qualitative studies.	High: This finding was graded as high confidence because of the richness of the data, and there were only moderate concerns regarding methodological limitations.

## Other evidence sources underpinning the key principles

The key principles were also informed by Foundations' advisory group and in-house knowledge and experience of parenting disabled children and young people.

### Advisory group

Before commencing work on the Practice Guide, we established an advisory group made up of academics, stakeholders and professionals within the field. We met with the advisory group multiple times across the course of conducting the evidence review and during the Guidance writing. We also had correspondence with the group over email.



The purpose of the advisory group has been to:

- Help with designing the aims and objectives of the evidence review
- Unpick the findings of the evidence review
- Provide guidance on language and terminology
- Review and provide feedback on the Practice Guide.

By having a broad range of perspectives, the key principles reflect key voices in the sector and will hopefully ensure that the Guide can have meaningful impact to its readers.

### **In-house expertise**

The team working on the Guide bring with them their own methodological, practical, and personal experience and expertise. Those who have written and contributed to the key principles section have experience working in local authorities and Government, and those who have written the recommendations have extensive experience in intervention evaluation, evidence synthesis, evidence-informed practice, and knowledge mobilisation.

## **Recommendations for further evaluation and testing of interventions in England**

- For future research, consistent use of validated outcome measures will facilitate comparability and synthesis of findings across studies. It is essential for studies to employ long-term follow-ups to evaluate the sustainability of intervention effects and guide future research.
- Future systematic reviews should focus on examining and reporting family dynamics, socioeconomic influences, and co-parenting relationships. This will help to provide a more holistic understanding of intervention impacts.
- Future research should actively seek to involve and report on parents/carers and children and young people from minoritised backgrounds in intervention delivery and impact evaluations. This is critical to informing the development of equitable and generalisable interventions.
- Future studies should seek to report findings separately for important demographic subgroups (e.g., by ethnicity), to ensure there are no inequalities in the effectiveness of certain types of interventions across diverse populations.
- Future research should focus on addressing the high heterogeneity in intervention effectiveness observed in the meta-analysis and meta-regression part of our evidence review. It is crucial to conduct more focused reviews that examine the specific components of interventions, such as delivery format, length, and content, to better understand which factors contribute to success across different child disabilities.
- There is a need for further high-quality studies to explore the mechanisms underlying the age-related differences in intervention outcomes, particularly why younger children may benefit more than older age groups. This will help to design more age-appropriate interventions.



- Further high-quality RCTs are also needed to compare the effectiveness of different intervention formats (e.g., remote vs. face-to-face) among diverse populations.
- Additionally, further research is needed to determine the cost-effectiveness of different intervention models, as this will influence how widely they could be implemented in practice.

## References

### Evidence underpinning the recommendations

Data from the individual studies included in meta-analysis is available on the Open Science Framework: <https://osf.io/zqy29/files/osfstorage>

### Evidence underpinning the key principles

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