

About the Executive Summary

This executive summary provides the highlights of the most recent issue of the *Children's Mental Health Research Quarterly*, available for free at childhealthpolicy.ca. The *Quarterly* presents the best available research evidence on a variety of children's mental health topics. The BC Ministry of Children and Family Development funds the *Quarterly*.

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About the Children's Health Policy Centre

We are an interdisciplinary research group in the Faculty of Health Sciences at Simon Fraser University. We focus on improving social and emotional well-being for all children, and on the public policies needed to reach these goals. To learn more about our work, please see childhealthpolicy.ca.



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Promoting self-regulation and preventing ADHD symptoms

Among the many skills that children develop, self-regulation is particularly critical. This includes the ability to modulate activity levels, inhibit impulsivity and focus their attention. Self-regulation skills have also been linked to a host of other capacities, such as delaying gratification and being empathetic, making this skill critical for children's social and emotional well-being.

For most children, development proceeds without significant hurdles. However, some young people experience great enough challenges with self-regulation that they begin to display symptoms of attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder (ADHD). To identify ways of helping these children early in their development, we conducted a systematic review and found four programs that prevented at least one ADHD symptom: *Legacy for Children*, *Incredible Years*, *Incredible Years* with a child literacy component, and *SAFE Children*. These programs all focused on parents of young, at-risk children, teaching them skills to promote positive development. Although clinical benefits were modest, improvements nevertheless endured for two to four years for two of the programs — *Legacy for Children* and *SAFE Children*.

Implications for practice and policy

- **Intervene early.** For young children who come from disadvantaged families or who show early behavioural difficulties, it is possible to prevent the onset of problematic inattention, hyperactivity and impulsivity by improving parenting skills. It is notable that these problems can be prevented when children are very young — in the preschool or early school years — thereby likely averting the many negative consequences if symptoms had become entrenched.
- **Support parenting.** The four interventions we reviewed were originally designed to prevent behaviour problems or improve child health and development. Yet each program prevented childhood ADHD symptoms. This suggests that parent training can have far-reaching and unexpected effects, leading to substantial improvements in child well-being.
- **Use the power of groups.** Effective prevention programs can be delivered efficiently. *Incredible Years* is a good example. Typically delivered in just 12 group sessions, it has strong evidence of success in preventing conduct disorder and now, emerging evidence of success in preventing ADHD. Its group format means that more families can be served, and served more efficiently. The program's brevity means fewer demands on parents' time, making it more efficient and appealing for them too. An added benefit is that programs such as *Incredible Years* can be delivered in the evenings and on weekends, further increasing family access.

We found that it is possible to prevent ADHD symptoms, thereby promoting children's self-regulation skills. While more research is needed, we can still take steps to help children — by increasing their access to effective parenting programs such as *Incredible Years*.

Please view our [full issue](#) to learn more about preventing ADHD symptoms as well as promoting self-regulation. 🖐️