

What Works Clearinghouse



The Incredible Years

No studies of *The Incredible Years* that fall within the scope of the Early Childhood Education Interventions for Children with Disabilities review protocol meet What Works Clearinghouse (WWC) evidence standards. The lack of studies meeting WWC evidence standards means that, at this time, the WWC is unable to draw any conclusions based on research about the effectiveness or ineffectiveness of *The Incredible Years* on preschool children with disabilities in early education settings. Additional research is needed to determine the effectiveness or ineffectiveness of this intervention.

Program Description¹

The Incredible Years is an intervention composed of training programs for children, parents, and teachers that is intended to reduce children's aggression and improve their social skills. The three programs (child, parent, and teacher) can be used independently or in combination.

The child program focuses on building social and emotional skills for students in preschool through early elementary school. The child program can be delivered to children referred for difficult behavior or to an entire classroom as a preventive measure. This program can be offered in either a classroom or a clinical setting. In a classroom setting, the teacher presents 20- to 30-minute lessons two to three times a week during circle time. Alternately, the child program can be conducted as a pullout program for small groups of children. Lessons cover recognizing and understanding feelings, getting along with friends, anger management, problem solving, and behavior at school. In a clinical setting, referred students complete activities during 18–20 two-hour weekly small-group meetings.

Parent training programs focus on parenting skills, including positive discipline, promoting child learning and development, and involvement in children's life at school. The program also emphasizes parent interpersonal skills to improve communication with children and other parents.

The Incredible Years also includes two programs for teachers. The first addresses general classroom management as a means to improve student behavior and learning. The second is a training program for teachers who will deliver the child program to students in their classrooms.

Research²

The WWC identified 166 studies of *The Incredible Years* for preschool children with disabilities in early education settings that were published or released between 1989 and 2011.

Three studies are within the scope of the Early Childhood Education Interventions for Children with Disabilities review protocol but do not meet WWC evidence standards.

- One study was a randomized controlled trial in which the combination of overall and differential attrition exceeded WWC evidence standards. The resulting analytic intervention groups were too dissimilar at baseline to be considered equivalent. Therefore, this study did not meet WWC evidence standards.
- Two studies have the delivery of the intervention as a confounding factor, which makes it impossible to attribute the observed effect solely to *The Incredible Years*. In one study, the author led all of the sessions for the interven-

tion group and did not lead the control group sessions. In the second study, the intervention sessions were led by the same two-person team, while the control group sessions were led by different individuals. In both of these studies, reported program effects may be attributed to the individual(s) who delivered *The Incredible Years* rather than to the intervention itself.

Seventy-two studies are out of the scope of the Early Childhood Education Interventions for Children with Disabilities review protocol because they have an ineligible study design.

Ninety-one studies are out of the scope of the Early Childhood Education Interventions for Children with Disabilities review protocol for reasons other than study design.

References

Studies that do not meet WWC evidence standards

- Cummings, J. G., & Wittenberg, J. (2008). Supportive expressive therapy—Parent child version: An exploratory study. *Psychotherapy: Theory, Research, Practice, Training*, 45(2), 148–164. The study does not meet WWC evidence standards because the measures of effectiveness cannot be attributed solely to the intervention—there was only one unit assigned to one or both conditions.
- Lavigne, J. (2008). Treating oppositional defiant disorder in primary care: A comparison of three models. *Journal of Pediatric Psychology*, 33(5), 449–461. The study does not meet WWC evidence standards because it is a randomized controlled trial in which the combination of overall and differential attrition rates exceeds WWC standards for this area, and the subsequent analytic intervention and comparison groups are not shown to be equivalent.
- McIntyre, L. L. (2008). Parent training for young children with developmental disabilities: Randomized controlled trial. *American Journal on Mental Retardation*, 113(5), 356–368. The study does not meet WWC evidence standards because the measures of effectiveness cannot be attributed solely to the intervention—there was only one unit assigned to one or both conditions.

Studies that are ineligible for review using the Early Childhood Education Interventions for Children with Disabilities Evidence Review Protocol

- Alegre, A. (2011). Parenting styles and children's emotional intelligence: What do we know? *The Family Journal*, 19(1), 56–62. The study is ineligible for review because it is a secondary analysis of the effectiveness of an intervention, such as a meta-analysis or research literature review.
- Axberg, U., Hansson, K., & Broberg, A. G. (2007). Evaluation of the Incredible Years Series—An open study of its effects when first introduced in Sweden. *Nordic Journal of Psychiatry*, 61(2), 143–151. The study is ineligible for review because it does not take place in the geographic area specified in the protocol.
- Baker-Henningham, H. (2011). Transporting evidence-based interventions across cultures: Using focus groups with teachers and parents of pre-school children to inform the implementation of the Incredible Years teacher training programme in Jamaica. *Child: Care, Health & Development*, 37(5), 649–661. The study is ineligible for review because it does not use a comparison group design or a single-case design.
- Baker-Henningham, H., & Walker, S. (2009). A qualitative study of teacher's perceptions of an intervention to prevent conduct problems in Jamaican pre-schools. *Child: Care, Health & Development*, 35(5), 632–642. The study is ineligible for review because it does not take place in the geographic area specified in the protocol.
- Baker-Henningham, H., Walker, S., Powell, C., & Gardner, J. M. (2009). A pilot study of the Incredible Years teacher training programme and a curriculum unit on social and emotional skills in community pre-schools in Jamaica. *Child: Care, Health & Development*, 35(5), 624–631. The study is ineligible for review because it does not take place in the geographic area specified in the protocol.
- Barker, C. H., Cook, K. L., & Borrego, J. J. (2010). Addressing cultural variables in parent training programs with Latino families. *Cognitive and Behavioral Practice*, 17(2), 157–166. The study is ineligible for review because it does not include an outcome within a domain specified in the protocol.
- Barrera, M. J., Biglan, A., Taylor, T. K., Gunn, B. K., Smolkowski, K., Black, C.,...Fowler, R. C. (2002). Early elementary school intervention to reduce conduct problems: A randomized trial with Hispanic and non-Hispanic children. *Prevention Science*, 3(2), 83–94. The study is ineligible for review because it does not use a sample aligned with the protocol—the sample is not within the specified age or grade range.
- Baydar, N., Reid, M. J., & Webster-Stratton, C. (2003). The role of mental health factors and program engagement in the effectiveness of a preventive parenting program for Head Start mothers. *Child Development*, 74(5), 1433–1453. The study is ineligible for review because it does not use a sample aligned with the protocol—the sample is not within the specified age or grade range.

- Bayer, J., Hiscock, H., Scalzo, K., Mathers, M., McDonald, M., Morris, A.,...Wake, M. (2009). Systematic review of preventive interventions for children's mental health: What would work in Australian contexts? *Australian and New Zealand Journal of Psychiatry*, 43(8), 695–710. The study is ineligible for review because it does not take place in the geographic area specified in the protocol.
- Beauchaine, T. P., Webster-Stratton, C., & Reid, M. J. (2005). Mediators, moderators, and predictors of 1-year outcomes among children treated for early-onset conduct problems: A latent growth curve analysis. *Journal of Consulting & Clinical Psychology*, 73(3), 371–388. The study is ineligible for review because it is a secondary analysis of the effectiveness of an intervention, such as a meta-analysis or research literature review.
- Borden, L. A., Schultz, T. R., Herman, K. C., & Brooks, C. M. (2010). The Incredible Years parent training program: Promoting resilience through evidence-based prevention groups. *Group Dynamics: Theory, Research, and Practice*, 14(3), 230–241. The study is ineligible for review because it does not include an outcome within a domain specified in the protocol.
- Bratton, S. C. (2010). Meeting the early mental health needs of children through school-based play therapy: A review of outcome research. In A. A. Drewes & C. E. Schaefer (Eds.), *School-based play therapy* (2nd ed., pp. 17–58). Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley. The study is ineligible for review because it is a secondary analysis of the effectiveness of an intervention, such as a meta-analysis or research literature review.
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- Brotman, L. M., O'Neal, C. R., Huang, K. Y., Gouley, K. K., Rosenfelt, A., & Shrout, P. E. (2009). An experimental test of parenting practices as a mediator of early childhood physical aggression. *Journal of Child Psychology and Psychiatry*, 50(3), 235–245. The study is ineligible for review because it does not use a sample aligned with the protocol—the sample either includes less than 50% students with identified disabilities or more than 50% students with autism.
- Bywater, T. (2011). Incredible Years parent training support for nursery staff working within a disadvantaged Flying Start area in Wales: A feasibility study. *Child Care in Practice*, 17(3), 285–302. The study is ineligible for review because it does not take place in the geographic area specified in the protocol.
- Bywater, T., Hutchings, J., Linck, P., Whitaker, C., Daley, D., Yeo, S. T., & Tudor Edwards, R. T. (2011). Incredible Years parent training support for foster careers in Wales: A multi-centre feasibility study. *Child: Care, Health & Development*, 37(2), 233–243. The study is ineligible for review because it does not take place in the geographic area specified in the protocol.
- Carlson, J. S., Tired, H. B., Bender, S. L., & Benson, L. (2011). The influence of group training in the Incredible Years teacher classroom management program on preschool teachers' classroom management strategies. *Journal of Applied School Psychology*, 27(2), 134–154. The study is ineligible for review because it does not use a comparison group design or a single-case design.
- Carr, A. (2009). The effectiveness of family therapy and systemic interventions for child-focused problems. *Journal of Family Therapy*, 31(1), 3–45. The study is ineligible for review because it is a secondary analysis of the effectiveness of an intervention, such as a meta-analysis or research literature review.
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Endnotes

¹ The descriptive information for this program was obtained from a publicly available source: the program's website (<http://www.incredibleyears.com/>, downloaded February 2011). The WWC requests developers to review the program description sections for accuracy from their perspective. The program description was provided to the developer in June 2011 and we incorporated feedback from the developer. Further verification of the accuracy of the descriptive information for this program is beyond the scope of this review. The literature search reflects documents publicly available by August 2011.

² The studies in this report were reviewed using WWC Evidence Standards, Version 2.1, as described in protocol Version 2.0. The evidence presented in this report is based on available research. Findings and conclusions may change as new research becomes available.

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Glossary of Terms

Attrition	Attrition occurs when an outcome variable is not available for all participants initially assigned to the intervention and comparison groups. The WWC considers the total attrition rate and the difference in attrition rates across groups within a study.
Clustering adjustment	If treatment assignment is made at a cluster level and the analysis is conducted at the student level, the WWC will adjust the statistical significance to account for this mismatch, if necessary.
Confounding factor	A confounding factor is a component of a study that is completely aligned with one of the study conditions, making it impossible to separate how much of the observed effect was due to the intervention and how much was due to the factor.
Design	The design of a study is the method by which intervention and comparison groups were assigned.
Domain	A domain is a group of closely related outcomes.
Effect size	The effect size is a measure of the magnitude of an effect. The WWC uses a standardized measure to facilitate comparisons between outcomes and studies.
Eligibility	A study is eligible for review and inclusion in this report if it falls within the scope of the review protocol and uses either an experimental or matched comparison group design.
Equivalence	A demonstration that the analysis sample groups are similar on observed characteristics defined in the review area protocol.
Extent of evidence	An indication of how much evidence supports the findings. The criteria for the extent of evidence levels are given in the WWC Procedures and Standards Handbook (version 2.1).
Improvement index	Along a percentile distribution of students, the improvement index represents the gain or loss of the average student due to the intervention. As the average student starts at the 50th percentile, the measure ranges from -50 to +50.
Multiple comparison adjustment	When a study includes multiple outcomes or comparison groups, the WWC will adjust the statistical significance to account for the multiple comparisons, if necessary.
Quasi-experimental design (QED)	A quasi-experimental design (QED) is a research design in which subjects are assigned to treatment and comparison groups through a process that is not random.
Randomized controlled trial (RCT)	A randomized controlled trial (RCT) is an experiment in which investigators randomly assign eligible participants into treatment and comparison groups.
Rating of effectiveness	The WWC rates the effects of an intervention in each domain based on the quality of the research design and the magnitude, statistical significance, and consistency in findings. The criteria for the ratings of effectiveness are given in the WWC Procedures and Standards Handbook (version 2.1).
Single-case design	A research approach in which an outcome variable is measured repeatedly within and across different conditions that are defined by the presence or absence of an intervention.
Standard deviation	The standard deviation of a measure shows how much variation exists from the average. A low standard deviation indicates that the data points tend to be very close to the mean; a high standard deviation indicates that the data points are spread out over a large range of values.
Statistical significance	Statistical significance is the probability that the difference between groups is a result of chance rather than a real difference between the groups. The WWC labels a finding statistically significant if the likelihood that the difference is due to chance is less than 5% ($p < 0.05$).
Substantively important	A substantively important finding is one that has an effect size of 0.25 or greater, regardless of statistical significance.

Please see the [WWC Procedures and Standards Handbook \(version 2.1\)](#) for additional details.