

Parent Training vs Education: How Parents Are Effective Teachers



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It's important for parents to have an understanding of their child's challenges and if they have one, their disability. This will, of course, help parents hone in on where to seek support, the skill areas their child can develop, and even perhaps understand a prognosis to guide future focus. But, what about taking it a step further and receiving training to address their child's challenges themselves or alongside teachers/therapists? At Rethink, we know parents can be effective teachers. Sometimes we know it before they do! After a little guidance and training, few things rival hearing a parent say they potty trained their child, implemented a plan to motivate their teenager to do his homework independently, or successfully reduced their child's severe tantrums.

So what is the difference between parent education and parent training? Bearss et al. (2016) recently reviewed the impact of these two approaches on parent-reported disruptive behavior of their children. A 24-week randomized clinical trial of 180 children was conducted where parents were split between two groups.

- **Parent Training:** consisted of 11, 60 to 90-minute sessions (done 1:1) addressing topics such as finding out the function (or the "why") behind their child's behavior, strategies to prevent disruptive behavior, using positive reinforcement for appropriate behaviors, how to teach new skills, and how to maintain improvements over time. The parent training sessions used video modeling, direct instruction, practice, and role plays with feedback. Simple homework was given to

was no instruction on behavior management.

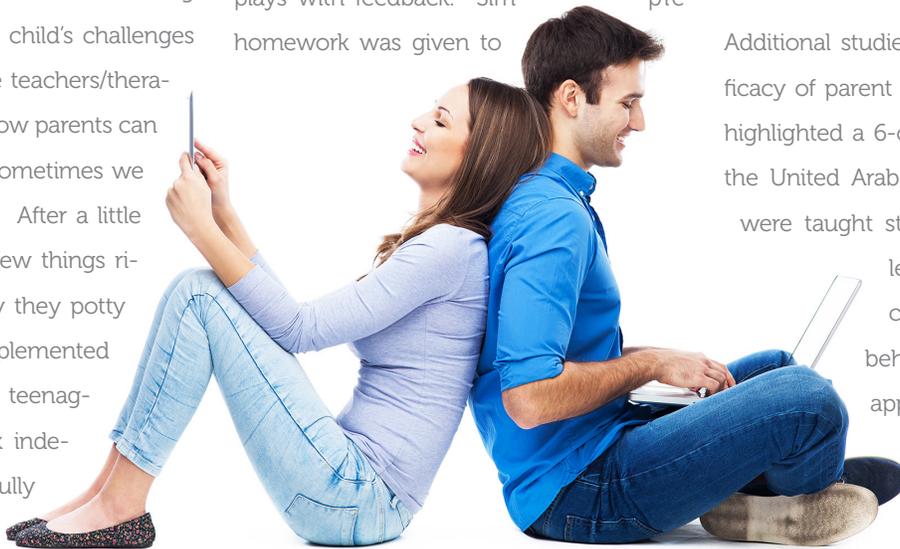
The results of the study show that despite improvements across both groups, the Parent Training group was superior when parents rated a reduction in their child's disruptive and non-compliant behaviors, and when a clinician (unaware of group assignment) measured overall improvement.

Additional studies further illustrate the efficacy of parent training. One such study highlighted a 6-class training sequence in the United Arab Emirates (UAE). Parents were taught strategies to prevent challenging behaviors from occurring and how to address behaviors that do occur with appropriate consequences using video modeling and live trainer instruction. Results from the pre-course questionnaire

show that 34% of parents felt they could effectively control their child's behavior. That number rose to 73% in their post-course questionnaire. One parent commented: "I have much better control because I have started to find the reason behind the challenging behaviour of my child. I was always nervous, but I feel quieter because I learned how to solve the problem before it began.

- **Parent Education:** consisted of 12, 60 to 90-minute sessions where parents received handouts and learned information such as essentials of evaluation, developmental changes, advocacy, educational planning, and the current treatment options. There

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For example I tried to avoid reasons that made my child go on (to) tantrum.” This program had a strong positive impact on the parents’ feelings of efficacy and their attitude towards their children (Gaad & Thabet, 2016).

Another study highlighting the need and efficacy of parent training was conducted by Preece (2014) in the UK. It consisted of 12 hours of group discussion, activities, and lecture with parents on topics such as safe physical intervention and positive behavior supports (involving proactive and reactive strategies for challenging behavior). The results of this study showed an increase in the parents’ confidence in understanding and managing their children’s behavior as well as a reduction in the need to resort to physical interventions.

One study conducted in Turkey highlighted not a reduction in behavior but an increase in skill building (Besler & Kurt, 2016). It’s exciting to point out that this study focused on training mothers to use video modeling, an evidence-based teaching strategy where a model shows the child how to complete a skill via a video as opposed to live teaching. Mothers were trained how to create a list of teaching steps (a “task analysis”), how to pick a model, how to use the video to teach their child to build a Lego train, etc. The results showed that the mothers were able to prepare videos with 100% accuracy and implemented the video modeling procedure with 96.39% accuracy!

Lastly, we wanted to highlight one study which closely aligns with our work at Re-

think. Parents of eight children participated in a 12-week online intervention program (plus three-month follow up period) where they engaged in a combination of self-guided learning via a website paired with live teleconsultation with clinicians. Via a web-camera, the clinicians observed parents teaching their children and provided feedback, as well as held discussions with parents. At the end of the study, parents reported having a better understanding and appreciation for teaching their children, feeling confident in addressing their child’s needs and sharing information with other caregivers, finding the website to be a valuable resource, and feeling that the teleconsultation was highly important in understanding the application of their newly acquired skills (Vismara, McCormick, Young, Nadhan, & Monlux, 2013).

Overall, there have been many studies showing that not only are parents effective teachers but that with training and support, their confidence towards their skills can increase dramatically (for full studies and results, see references). We at Rethink believe that although it’s important to have the education on their child’s challenges or disability, possessing the skills and assurance to play an active role in their child’s learning can benefit not only the child but the parent as well.

We encourage you to keep up the good work and to continue developing stronger skills in supporting your child’s learning. When you’re ready to tackle new challenges or need support, Rethink is here to help!

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