The Incredible Years® Programs for ADHD in Young Children: A Critical Review of the Evidence

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Abstract

This study evaluated the effectiveness of Incredible Years® (IY) programs for Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) in children aged 3 to 8 years based on a systematic literature review. Effects of IY programs for children with or at risk for ADHD are examined in addition to the impact on ADHD behaviors in young children identified as having conduct problems or disruptive behavior. Search strategies identified 17 publications reflecting 11 unique intervention studies, including three with samples demonstrating elevated ADHD symptoms or meeting criteria for ADHD. Effects on ADHD outcomes, primarily parent report, were positive and comparable to those seen for conduct problems; benefits were also seen in social skills. Smaller and more variable effects were seen on observational measures and teacher reports. The overall methodological strength of this literature was relatively strong, although the lack of fidelity measurement is a weakness. Using criteria established by the American Psychological Association’s Division 53 (Society of Clinical Child and Adolescent Psychology), the IY Basic Parent Program may be considered Probably Efficacious for young children at risk for ADHD. In addition, the combined IY parent and child treatment programs can be considered Possibly Efficacious for children aged 4 to 6 years with ADHD, based on one study by the developer with a diagnosed sample.