

Learning to manage kids' behaviour – can books, videos and other media be just as effective as a therapist?

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The Bottom Line:

Research has shown that parents who demonstrate effective behaviour management techniques can have a positive effect on their child's behaviour. Many communities offer programs designed to teach these techniques to parents, but a shortage of trained therapists and the costs of such therapy may put it out of reach for many parents. This review found that books, videos and other media-based instruction in behaviour management can be helpful in reducing childhood behaviour problems. It did not show whether any one form of instruction (books, telephone support, or videos) was better than another. The improvement was greatest for children of parents who also received up to two hours of instruction from a therapist.

What problem is being addressed?

Improving parents' behaviour management techniques has been found to be very effective in improving mild to moderate behaviour problems in children. The problem is that not all parents have the time or money to receive this instruction from a therapist. Media-based interventions are being widely marketed to the public, but do they work?

What intervention is being tested?

This review looked at media-based interventions such as audiotapes, books, computer programs, manuals, videotapes, and websites (alone and in combination) that are designed to teach parents strategies to manage their child's behaviour.

What is the *real scientific* evidence?

The authors of this review assessed the published literature, locating 11 well-conducted studies of children aged 2 to 15 years whose parents received some sort of media-based intervention. Participants included children with learning disabilities, conduct problems, sleep problems and Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD). The interventions examined included video modelling, written booklets, telephone support and written manuals.

The review found that media-based instruction in behaviour management techniques was moderately effective for reducing behavioural problems in children. All 11 studies showed behavioural improvements but their results varied. There was greater improvement if up to 2 hours of therapist time was also part of the intervention.

The studies were not able to show whether one form of instruction (books, telephone support, videos, etc.) was superior to another. Due to these limitations, further research is necessary.

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