

Schoolchildren and their Families

Review: March 2017

Note on provider involvement: This provider has agreed to EIF's terms of reference, and the assessment has been conducted and published with the full cooperation of the programme provider.

Schoolchildren and their Families (SAF) is delivered to couples specifically when their children are making the transition to school, and has been tested on a largely middle class, low risk sample.

This intervention is based on the same programme model as Parents as Partners/Supporting Father Involvement.

Like Supporting Father Involvement, groups of couples attend 16 weekly two-hour sessions delivered by male and female co-practitioners. Each group meeting begins with an open-ended check-in, followed by an agenda that focuses on one of the five aspects of life in the SFI/SAF risk-protective model of family functioning.

1. Parents' individual adaptation
2. Couple relationship quality
3. Relationship quality in parents' families of origin
4. Quality of parents' relationship with the child
5. Balance between life stressors and social supports

A component of Schoolchildren and their Families seeks to improve children's outcomes by improving the quality of interparental relationships (IPR).

Evidence
rating: **3**

Cost rating:
NA

EIF Programme Assessment

Schoolchildren and their Families has evidence of a **short-term positive impact** on child outcomes from at least one rigorous evaluation.

Evidence
rating: **3**

What does the evidence rating mean?

Level 3 indicates **evidence of efficacy**. This means the programme can be described as evidence-based: it has evidence from at least one rigorously conducted RCT or QED demonstrating a statistically significant positive impact on at least one child outcome.

This programme does not receive a rating of 4 as it has not yet replicated its results in another rigorously conducted study, where at least one study indicates long-term impacts, and at least one uses measures independent of study participants.

Cost rating

NA indicates that the information required to generate a cost rating is not available at this time.

Cost rating:
NA

Child outcomes

According to the best available evidence for this programme's impact, it can achieve the following positive outcomes for children:

Supporting children's mental health and wellbeing

Reduced internalising symptoms

Based on study 1a

Improvement on the Child Adaptive Behavior Inventory (teacher report)

Improvement index: **+27**

This means we would expect the average participant in the comparison group who did not receive the intervention (ie, someone for whom 50% of their peers have better outcomes and 50% have worse outcomes), to improve to the point where they would have better outcomes than 77% and worse outcomes than 23% of their peers, if they had received the intervention.

Long-term A year later

Enhancing school achievement & employment

Improved academic achievement

Based on study 1a

Improvement on the Peabody Individual Achievement Test-Revised

Improvement index: **+27**

This means we would expect the average participant in the comparison group who did not receive the intervention (ie, someone for whom 50% of their peers have better outcomes and 50% have worse outcomes), to improve to the point where they would have better outcomes than 77% and worse outcomes than 23% of their peers, if they had received the intervention.

Long-term A year later

Preventing crime, violence and antisocial behaviour

Reduced externalising symptoms

Based on study 1a

Improvement on the Child Adaptive Behavior Inventory (teacher report)

Improvement index: **+41**

This means we would expect the average participant in the comparison group who did not receive the intervention (ie, someone for whom 50% of their peers have better outcomes and 50% have worse outcomes), to improve to the point where they would have better outcomes than 91% and worse outcomes than 9% of their peers, if they had received the intervention.

Long-term A year later

This programme also has evidence of supporting positive outcomes for couples, parents or families that may be relevant to a commissioning decision. Please see the 'About the evidence' section for more detail.

Key programme characteristics

Who is it for?

The best available evidence for this programme relates to the following age-groups:

- Preschool

How is it delivered?

The best available evidence for this programme relates to implementation through these delivery models:

- Group

Where is it delivered?

The best available evidence for this programme relates to its implementation in these settings:

- Out-patient health setting

The programme may also be delivered in these settings:

- Community centre
- Out-patient health setting

How is it targeted?

The best available evidence for this programme relates to its implementation as:

- Universal
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Where has it been implemented?

United Kingdom, United States

UK provision

This programme has been implemented in the UK.

UK evaluation

This programme's best evidence does not include evaluation conducted in the UK.

Spotlight sets

EIF includes this programme in the following Spotlight sets:

- improving interparental relationships parenting programmes with violence reduction outcomes
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About the programme

What happens during delivery?

How is it delivered?

- Schoolchildren and their Families is delivered in 16 sessions of two hours' duration each by two clinically-trained male-female practitioners, to groups of six families.

What happens during the intervention?

- During the sessions, parents learn strategies for managing their child's behaviour and improving their co-parenting practices through joint activities and group discussions involving the couples.
- The evaluation of Schoolchildren and their Families investigates two different versions of the programme:
 - Marital focus – In these groups, when a member raised a problem for discussion in the open-ended part of the evening, leaders highlighted the effect of the problem on the partners' relationship as a couple. Leaders of these groups also focused on characteristics of the couple's relationship that might be affecting their ability to solve the problem.
 - Parenting focus – Here, leaders highlighted the implications of raised problems for the parents' relationships with their children.

What are the implementation requirements?

Who can deliver it?

- Two practitioners deliver this programme. Both are Schoolchildren and their Families' Group Leaders with NFQ-9/10 level qualifications.

What are the training requirements?

- Both practitioners have 24 hours of programme training. Booster training of practitioners is recommended.

How are the practitioners supervised?

- It is recommended that practitioners are supervised by one programme developer supervisor (qualified to NFQ-9/10 level).

What are the systems for maintaining fidelity?

- Training manual
- Other printed materials
- Face-to-face training
- Supervision
- Accreditation
- Booster training
- Fidelity monitoring

Is there a licensing requirement?

Yes, there is a licence required to run this programme.

How does it work? (Theory of Change)

How does it work?

- Schoolchildren and their Families is based on research evidence linking positive child development to increased father involvement and an improved father/mother relationship.
- Schoolchildren and their Families provides parents with strategies for enhancing family life in five domains known to affect father involvement:
 - The father and mother's individual wellbeing
 - The quality of the relationship between the father and mother
 - The quality of the relationship between the parents and their children
 - Breaking negative cycles across generations
 - Coping with life stress and enhancing social support.
- In the short term, fathers' are expected to become more involved with their children and family life, resulting in greater parenting and co-parenting satisfaction. Strengthening the co-parenting relationship is expected to lead to more effective parenting by both parents.
- In the longer term, increased father involvement and family harmony should positively affect children's behaviour and mental wellbeing.

Intended outcomes

Supporting children's mental health and wellbeing
Preventing child maltreatment
Enhancing school achievement & employment
Preventing crime, violence and antisocial behaviour

Contact details

Professor Carolyn Pape Cowan ccowan@berkeley.edu University of California, Berkeley

Professor Philip Cowan pcowan@berkeley.edu University of California, Berkeley

<http://www.tavistockrelationships.ac.uk/news/919-parents-as-partners-schoolchildren-their-families-project>

About the evidence

Schoolchildren and their Families' most rigorous evidence comes from one RCT which was conducted in the USA. This study identified statistically significant positive impact on a number of child and parent outcomes. This programme is underpinned by one study with a level 3 rating, hence the programme receives a level 3 rating overall.

Study 1a

Citation: Cowan, C. P., Cowan, P. A., & Heming, G. (2005)

Design: RCT

Country: United States

Sample: 192 two-parent families with children entering kindergarten the following autumn

Timing: Post-intervention

Child outcomes:

- Reduced internalising symptoms
 - Improved academic achievement
 - Reduced externalising symptoms
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Other outcomes:

- Marital-focus intervention: • Reduced negative emotion (expert observation) • Reduced marital conflict (expert observation)
Parenting-focus intervention: • Reduced marital conflict (expert observation) • Reduced non-responsive parenting (expert observation) • Increased warmth and respect of child's autonomy (expert observation of fathers) • Increased structured parenting (expert observation of mothers)
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Study rating: 3

Cowan, C. P., Cowan, P. A., & Heming, G. (2005). Two variations of a preventive intervention for couples: Effects on parents and children during the transition to elementary school. In P. A. Cowan, C. P. Cowan, J. Ablow, V. K. Johnson, & J. Measelle (Eds.), *The Family Context of Parenting in Children's Adaptation to Elementary School* (pp. 277-312). Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.

Available at <http://psycnet.apa.org/index.cfm?fa=search.displayRecord&UID=2005-04587-011>

Study design and sample

The first study is a rigorously conducted RCT. Families were randomly allocated to one of three intervention conditions: (1) a couples group in which facilitators focused more on parent-child issues (eg, parents' reactions when the child disobeys); (2) a couples group in which facilitators focused more on issues between the parents as a couple when the child disobeys; and (3) a brief consultation condition (control group), in which both parents were offered the opportunity to consult once a year for three years with the co-leader staff couple who interviewed them initially.

The study was conducted in the USA, with parents whose first child was aged four to five years old. The sample was considered 'low-risk' and exclusively contained two-parent families with children about to enter kindergarten. Most parents were European American (84%), with middle to upper incomes.

Measures

Children's academic achievement (assessed on the Peabody Individual Achievement test), self-perceptions (Berkeley Puppet Interview), and social-emotional behaviours (teacher-report on the Child Adaptive Behavior Inventory) were assessed at kindergarten and then again at first grade.

Parenting style was assessed pre and post intervention and at the end of first grade (using the Block and Block task). In addition, parent and relationship outcomes were measured: marital adjustment and satisfaction (parent self-report on the Short Marital Adjustment Test), as well as couple communication (expert observation – procedures developed by Gottman and Levenson).

Findings

This study identified statistically significant positive impact on a number of child outcomes. At post-test, for the marital-focus intervention, significant differences between the groups favouring the marital-focus intervention were identified on academic achievement and externalising symptoms. In addition, significant effects favouring the marital-focus intervention were identified on negative emotion and marital conflict. At post-test, for the parenting-focus intervention, significant differences between the groups favouring the marital-focus intervention were identified on internalising symptoms and child self-perceptions. In addition, significant effects favouring the parenting-focus intervention were identified on marital conflict, non-responsive parenting, warmth and respect of child's autonomy (fathers), and structured parenting (mothers).

Study 1b

Citation: Cowan, C., Cowan, P., & Barry, J. (2011)

Design: RCT

Country: United States

Sample: 192 two-parent families with children entering kindergarten the following autumn

Timing: 6-year follow up and 10-year follow up

Child outcomes:

Other outcomes:

- Marital-focus intervention (six years):
 - Increased positive couple communication (expert observation)
 - Reduced negative couple communication (expert observation)
- Marital-focus intervention (ten years):
 - Increased marital adjustment and satisfaction (mother self-report).

Study rating: 3

Cowan, C. P., Cowan, P. A., & Barry, J. (2011). Couples' groups for parents of preschoolers: Ten-year outcomes of a randomized trial. *Journal of Family Psychology*, 25(2), 240–250.

Available at <http://psycnet.apa.org/journals/fam/25/2/240/>

This paper describes additional outcomes from study 1a described above. In this case:

- At the 6-year follow-up and the 10-year follow-up, child behaviour and marital conflict/satisfaction and couple communication were assessed using the same measures as those described above (study 1a).
- This study identified statistically significant positive impact on a number of child outcomes. At the six-year follow-up, significant differences between the groups favouring the marital-focus intervention were identified on positive and negative couple communication. At the 10-year follow-up, significant differences between the groups favouring the marital-focus intervention were identified on marital adjustment and satisfaction.

Guidebook

The EIF Guidebook provides information about early intervention programmes that have at least preliminary evidence of achieving positive outcomes for children. It provides information based on EIF's assessment of the strength of evidence for a programme's effectiveness, and on detail about programmes shared with us by those who design, run and deliver them.

The Guidebook serves an important starting point for commissioners to find out more about effective early interventions, and for programme providers to find out more about what good evidence of impact looks like and how it can be captured. As just one of our key resources for commissioners and practitioners, the Guidebook is an essential part of EIF's work to support the development of and investment in effective early intervention programmes.

Our assessment of the evidence for a programme's effectiveness can inform and support certain parts of a commissioning decision, but it is not a substitute for professional judgment. Evidence about what has worked in the past offers no guarantee that an approach will work in all circumstances. Crucially, the Guidebook is not a market comparison website: ratings and other information should not be interpreted as a specific recommendation, kite mark or endorsement for any programme.

[How to read the Guidebook](#)

[EIF evidence standards](#)

[About the EIF Guidebook](#)

EIF

The Early Intervention Foundation (EIF) is an independent charity and a member of the What Works network. We support the use of effective early intervention for children, young people and their families: identifying signals of risk, and responding with effective interventions to improve outcomes, reduce hardship and save the public money in the long term.

We work by generating evidence and knowledge of what works in our field, putting this information in the hands of commissioners, practitioners and policymakers, and supporting the adoption of the evidence in local areas and relevant sectors.

www.EIF.org.uk | [@TheEIFoundation](https://twitter.com/TheEIFoundation)

10 Salamanca Place, London SE1 7HB | +44 (0)20 3542 2481

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