

Parents Forever

Review: January 2021

Parents Forever is a divorce education programme. It is a targeted selected programme for divorced or separated parents (or parents in the process of divorce or separation) who have children between the ages of 0 and 18. The programme is delivered in a variety of settings, including community-based settings, and aims to mitigate adverse outcomes from divorce and separation on parents and their children. A version of the programme can also be delivered online.

The Parents Forever programme focuses on addressing parental wellbeing, the coparenting relationship and the parent-child relationship, as a mechanism by which to improve child and family outcomes post-separation.

It is a skills-based intervention that teaches parents specific strategies for communicating and interacting with one another, in order to reduce the conflict to which their children are exposed.

Parents Forever seeks to improve children's outcomes by improving the quality of interparental relationships (IPR).

Evidence
rating: **2**

Cost rating: **1**

EIF Programme Assessment

Parents Forever has **preliminary evidence** of improving a child outcome, but we cannot be confident that the programme caused the improvement.

Evidence
rating: **2**

What does the evidence rating mean?

Level 2 indicates that the programme has evidence of improving a child outcome from a study involving at least 20 participants, representing 60% of the sample, using validated instruments.

This programme does not receive a rating of 3 as its best evidence is not from a rigorously conducted RCT or QED evaluation.

Note that this Guidebook page focuses on the version of Parents Forever that is delivered in-person over eight hours. Please note that there are three other main versions of Parents Forever: a shorter in-person four-hour version, and an online versions of four and eight hours. Note also that alongside a number of positive findings suggesting improvements in emotional symptoms, peer problems and conduct problems, one of the studies included in EIF's assessment suggested that following the intervention, parents reported a decline in their child's prosocial behaviour, as compared to parents in the comparison group.

Cost rating

A rating of 1 indicates that a programme has a low cost to set up and deliver, compared with other interventions reviewed by EIF. This is equivalent to an estimated unit cost of less than £100.

Cost rating: **1**

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

Improved child emotional symptoms - based on **study 1**

Preventing crime, violence and antisocial behaviour

Reduced child peer problems - based on **study 1**

Reduced child conduct problems - based on **study 1**

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:

- Infants
- Toddlers
- Preschool
- Primary school
- Preadolescents
- Adolescents

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:

- Community centre

How is it targeted?

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

- Targeted selective
-

Where has it been implemented?

Canada, Hong Kong, United States

UK provision

This programme has not been implemented in the UK.

UK evaluation

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

About the programme

What happens during delivery?

How is it delivered?

- Parents Forever is delivered in a variety of formats. The focus of this Guidebook page is the eight-hour version that is delivered in three sessions of varying duration by facilitators to groups of 15 parents.
- Please note that there are three other main versions of Parents Forever: a shorter in-person 4-hour version (delivered to 15 parents in groups, in two sessions of two hours' duration), and online versions of four and eight hours.

What happens during the intervention?

- The purpose of the Parents Forever programme is to facilitate awareness of issues faced by children when parents separate or divorce, and to provide parents with the motivation and skills needed to communicate and co-parent together, so as to best help their children cope with the separation process.
- The Parents Forever course is divided into five main components:
 - Course Introduction: this brief session is designed to introduce parents to the programme and give them an overview of what to expect during the course.
 - Taking Care of Yourself: this session helps parents understand and embrace that they need to take care of themselves, first, in order to effectively help their children through a family transition.
 - Taking Care of Your Children: this session helps parents assess where their children are at and what they need, and find the strengths and resources needed to bring both parents and children through the transition.
 - Being Successful with Co-parenting: this session helps parents explore co-parenting and skills that will help them successfully form a parenting partnership with their children's other parent.
 - Parents Forever Course Conclusion: this brief session is designed to conclude the programme by introducing parents to different paths they may take in the future.
- The activities of the programmes include self-reflection, group discussion, interactive exercises (like video and follow-up activity), self-assessment and action planning.

What are the implementation requirements?

Who can deliver it?

- The practitioner who delivers this programme is a facilitator with no qualification requirements beyond programme training.

What are the training requirements?

- The practitioners have four hours of programme training. Booster training of practitioners is not required.

How are the practitioners supervised?

Practitioner supervision is provided through the following processes:

- Supervision of practitioners delivering the programme from the host agency is determined by the host site.

What are the systems for maintaining fidelity?

Programme fidelity is maintained through the following processes:

- Training manual
- Other printed material
- Other online material
- A programme agreement form

Is there a licensing requirement?

There is no licence required to run this programme.

How does it work? (Theory of Change)

How does it work?

- Divorced and separated coparents with low conflict, collaborative coparenting, higher levels of parental wellbeing, and increased parenting skills based on developmentally appropriate ages and stages, protect children from increased risk related to divorced and separated parents.
- The program aims to teach parents a variety of strategies to improve their individual levels of wellbeing, to work effectively in low conflict ways with their coparent, and to parent their children in developmentally appropriate ways.
- In the short term, the programme aims to improve parents' knowledge and skills related to improving and managing their individual wellbeing, implementing developmentally appropriate positive parenting, and how to effectively communicate and manage their relationship in low conflict ways with their coparent.
- In the longer term, the programme aims to reduce negative impacts on parents and children from divorce and separation.

Intended outcomes

Supporting children's mental health and wellbeing Preventing crime, violence and antisocial behaviour

Contact details

Ellie McCann mccan023@umn.edu

<https://extension.umn.edu/courses-and-events/parents-forever-online>

About the evidence

Parents Forever’s most rigorous evidence comes from one comparison group study that was conducted in the US.

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 2 rating, hence the programme receives a level 2 rating overall.

Study 1

Citation: Becher et al., 2018 | **Design:** Comparison group study

Country: United States | **Study rating:** 2

Sample: 222 parents, including 80 participants who were mandated to attend the Parents Forever programme. These parents were 37 years old on average, and the majority of participants self-identified as White and were in full-time employment.

Timing: Post-test; 3-month follow-up

Child outcomes:

Improved child emotional symptoms

Reduced child peer problems

Reduced child conduct problems

Other outcomes:

Improved self-efficacy

Improved physical health

Improved psychological health

Improved adult environmental health

Improved positive parenting

Reduced inconsistent discipline

Reduced poor supervision

Becher, E. H., Mcguire, J. K., McCann, E. M., Powell, S., Cronin, S. E., & Deenanath, V. (2018). Extension-Based Divorce Education: A Quasi-Experimental Design Study of the Parents Forever Program. *Journal of Divorce & Remarriage*, 59(8), 633-652

Available at <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/10502556.2018.1466256?journalCode=wjdr20>

Study design and sample

The first study is a quasi-experimental study, using a non-equivalent comparison group design.

Outcomes were assessed immediately after the intervention took place and at 3-months follow-up.

This study was conducted in the United States, with a sample of 222 parents. The intervention group sample was comprised of 80 participants (n=46 female, n=34 male) who were mandated to attend the Parents Forever programme. Their mean age was 37 years, ranging between 23 to 57 years. The majority of the participants self-identified as White (n=75, 93.8%), 70% (n=56) were in full-time employment and 28% (n=22) had some college education. The comparison group sample was comprised of 142 participants (n=82 female, n=60 male) who were recruited through the Qualtrics platform, which is an online workforce survey service. The comparison group was more ethnically diverse than the intervention group, with 64.5% self-identifying as White. Most of the sample was highly educated (43.4% had a 4-year college degree and 18.6% a post college degree) and reported working full-time (69.7%, n=99).

Measures

- Parenting skills (including positive parenting, inconsistent discipline and poor supervision) were measured using the Alabama Parenting Questionnaire (parent report)
- Adult wellbeing (including physical, psychological, social and environmental health) was measured using the World Health Organization's Quality of Life Brief Scale (parent report)
- General self-efficacy was measured using the New General Self-Efficacy Scale (parent report)
- Interparental conflict was measured using the Parent Adaptation of the Children's Perception of Interparental Conflict Scale (parent report)
- Coparenting alliance was measured using the Parenting Alliance Inventory (parent report)
- Children's internalising and externalising symptoms (including emotional symptoms, conduct problems, hyperactivity, peer problems and prosocial behaviours) were measured using the Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire (parent report)

Findings

This study identified statistically significant positive impact on a number

of child and parent outcomes.

This includes

- Improved child emotional symptoms (parent report)
- Reduced child conduct problems (parent report)
- Reduced child peer problems (parent report)

- Improved adult self-efficacy (parent report)
- Improved adult physical health (parent report)
- Improved adult psychological health (parent report)
- Improved adult environmental health (parent report)
- Improved positive parenting (parent report)
- Reduced inconsistent discipline (parent report)
- Reduced poor supervision (parent report)

Note also that alongside a number of positive findings suggesting improvements in emotional symptoms, peer problems and conduct problems, one of the studies included in EIF's assessment suggested that following the intervention, parents reported a decline in their child's prosocial behaviour, as compared to parents in the comparison group.

The conclusions that can be drawn from this study are limited by methodological issues pertaining to the treatment and comparison groups not being generated by sufficiently robust methods, resulting in unequal groups, hence why a higher rating is not achieved.

Other studies

The following studies were identified for this programme but did not count towards the programme's overall evidence rating. A programme receives the same rating as its most robust study or studies.

Brotherson, S.E., White, J. & Masich, C. (2010). Parents Forever: An Assessment of the Perceived Value of a Brief Divorce Education Program, *Journal of Divorce & Remarriage*, 51:8, 465-490.

Brotherson, S. E., Rittenbach, C., & White, J. M. (2012). Impacts of Parents Forever on Parental Behavior and Adjustment during Divorce: A Short-Term Follow-Up Evaluation Study. *Journal of Divorce & Remarriage*, 53(4), 267-291.

Becher, E. H., Cronin, S., McCann, E., Olson, K. A., Powell, S., & Marczak, M. S. (2015). Parents Forever: Evaluation of an Online Divorce Education Program. *Journal of Divorce & Remarriage*, 56(4), 261-276.

Cronin, S., Becher, E. H., McCann, E., McGuire, J., & Powell, S. (2017). Relational conflict and outcomes from an online divorce education program. *Evaluation and Program Planning*, 62, 49-55.

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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