



Supporting Durham's Families: The Incredible Years Basic Parent Training Program

Why Focus on Parent Training and Education?

Children don't come with instructions, and parenting isn't easy for most new parents. Being a good parent takes patience, experience, and knowledge that often come from lessons learned by trial and error. Any parent who is honest will admit that their child can try their patience and drive them to their wits end.

Sometimes a young child's behavior can become particularly challenging, especially when a child is disobedient, aggressive, or hyperactive. In such situations, parents may become frustrated and resort to harsh discipline or punishment. A negative cycle of a child's misbehavior and parental anger can quickly develop and escalate.

When young children fail to develop what psychologists call "social and emotional competence," their behavior problems can spill over to the classroom and lead to academic suspension and failure. An estimated 13 out of every 1,000 children enrolled in North Carolina's pre-kindergarten programs are expelled each year because of behavior problems, and 216 of every 1,000 children enrolled in grades K-12 are suspended annually.¹ Further, young children with high rates of aggressive behavior problems have been shown to be at greatest risk for continuing on the trajectory to drug abuse, deviant peer groups, school dropout, delinquency, substance abuse, and violence in adolescence.²

Considerable evidence indicates that a positive, consistent bond between parent and child leads to more positive communication and parenting strategies and a more socially competent child. The opposite is also true: high levels of parental negativity and hostility is disruptive to a child's ability to regulate their emotional responses and manage conflict appropriately.³ Certain parent training programs, including the *Incredible Years*, have demonstrated success in strengthening parenting skills and improving child behavior.

Durham's Partnership Launches the *Incredible Years* Basic Parent Training Program in Durham

The North Carolina Partnership for Children, the state's Smart Start administrator, was interested in encouraging local partnerships to start strategic, high-impact family support programs, and turned to the *Incredible Years* model when it launched the Smart Start Pilot Grant program in FY 2007-08. Durham's Partnership for Children ("The Partnership") was one of six local partnerships selected to pilot the *Incredible Years Program* because its grant proposal was innovative and had the potential to become a statewide model.

Parent training and education programs are promising approaches to increase parent's skills and confidence and reduce children's misbehavior early on.

Research shows that children with solid social and emotional skills will perform better in school and later in life.

Durham's Partnership has a long track record of promoting young children's healthy development and school readiness, and supporting parents in promoting their young child's development and readiness for school, so adding the *Incredible Years* was a natural fit for the organization. With \$40,000 in pilot grant funds from the North Carolina Partnership for Children and Duke Energy, Durham's Partnership for Children started the *Incredible Years* Basic Parent Training Program in 2007 to help Durham's parents increase their skills in dealing with their children's challenging behaviors.

To launch the *Incredible Years Program*, Durham's Partnership contracted with two existing parent education programs—**Welcome Baby at Durham County Cooperative Extension and Healthy Families Durham at the Center for Child & Family Health**. Both have a long history of providing excellent services for parents, which gave families the confidence to try out a new parenting program with a trusted agency. This approach also ensured that all kinds of families would have access to this program.

Welcome Baby specializes in serving new parents, including Spanish-speaking families, providing support through parenting classes, support groups, newsletters, and lending libraries of parenting resources. Healthy Families Durham has a track record of serving at-risk families and offers intensive, home-based parenting and social work services to help families connect to community resources. Adding the *Incredible Years* model increased the skills and capacity of both agencies, and filled a critical gap in the community for targeted parenting education. For example, the lead parent educator for Welcome Baby, has received her certification as a parent leader by the *Incredible Years*--the first in North Carolina.

The Partnership offered a total of five parent groups based on the *Incredible Years* program model that teaches parents new skills and strategies to help their children improve their social skills and behavior (see sidebar). The parent groups are led by staff from Welcome Baby and Healthy Families Durham who agreed to be trained as expert facilitators in the *Incredible Years* curriculum.

Each parent group consisted of parents with young children ages two to five years who had challenging behaviors. Two series were offered by bilingual facilitators to Spanish-speaking families. The groups met for two hour sessions for 14 consecutive weeks, and were guided by

The *Incredible Years* Program

The *Incredible Years* is a research-based, program for reducing children's aggression and fostering competence at home and at school.¹ This award-winning program has garnered national attention and is widely considered an exemplary "best practice" program.

Key Program Features:

- curriculum-based program
- two hour sessions for 14 consecutive weeks
- groups led by specially trained facilitators
- interactive training with group discussion
- special parent education materials

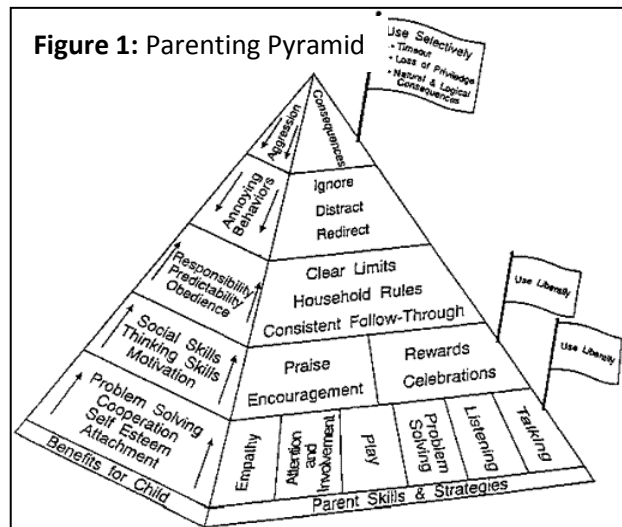
Multiple evaluation studies have shown positive, significant results including:

- Increases in positive parenting such as praise and limit setting
- Reduced use of criticism, spanking and harsh discipline
- Reduced parental depression and increased self-esteem
- Increases in positive family communication and problem-solving
- Reduced problem behaviors

the facilitators through a structured process that included teaching, role play, and group discussions, followed by weekly homework assignments.

The program emphasizes parenting skills known to promote children's social competence and reduce behavior problems such as: how to play with children, helping children learn, effective praise and use of incentives, effective limit-setting and strategies to handle misbehavior (see Figure 1). Parents bring their real life struggles with their children to the training and learn how to encourage positive behavior in their children by using praise and setting limits.

To encourage parent participation in the groups, child care, food and transportation are provided. Parents with young children have hectic schedules, and often these elements are essential components to a successful parenting program. The child care teachers who care for the children during the parent sessions must also have special expertise as the children have challenging behaviors that will test the skills and patience of the teachers just as it does their parents.



Program Results are Positive

The *Incredible Years* pilot program in North Carolina was evaluated by the Frank Porter Graham Child Development Institute at the University of North Carolina Chapel Hill using two nationally recognized assessment tools. The first survey, the Eyberg Child Behavior Inventory, measures the frequency of children’s healthy behaviors. The second, the Parent Practices Interview, assesses parent practices related to managing a child’s behavior focusing on types of discipline used and positive parenting techniques.

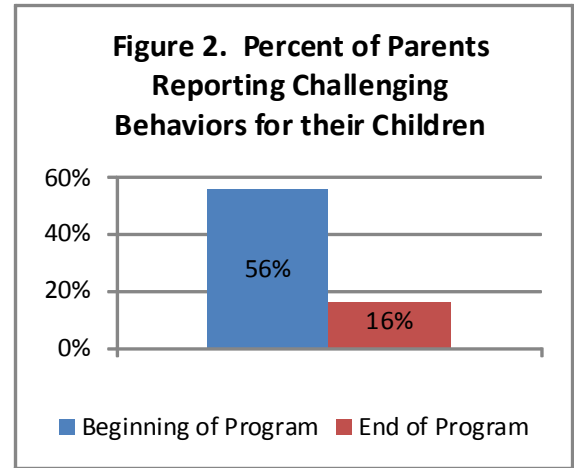
These surveys were given to parents at the beginning and at the end of the parent training series to determine their progress and evaluate the program’s effectiveness.

- Participants:** Multiple parents or caregivers, such as grandparents could participate in *The Incredible Years*. Overall, 66 individual parents or caregivers participated in the program between the spring of 2008 and June 2009. However, the evaluation results reported here are based on a total of 33 parent survey instruments because only one member of each family was selected for the evaluation process.

Table 1. PARENT PROFILE	
Parent Education	
High School or Less	44%
Some College/4 Year Degree/+	56%
Income	
<\$30,000	45%
\$30,000-50,000	18%
>\$50,000	36%
Ethnicity	
Caucasian	31%
Hispanic	34%
African American	13%
Asian	6%
Other	16%

As shown in Table 1, the program appealed to all types of families and was also successful in reaching many families whose children are at risk for school difficulties. Nearly half (45%) of the families reported an annual family income of less than \$30,000 and 44% had education levels of high school or less.

- **Child Behavior:** There was a remarkable decrease in the frequency of children’s problem behavior, as reported by the parents on the Eyberg Child Behavior Inventory after participation in the Incredible Years program (see Figure 2). For example, parents shared that their children were more cooperative about bed time, had fewer temper tantrums, fought less with friends and siblings, and completed chores.



- **Parenting Skills:** Parents reported making positive gains in many parenting areas such as decreasing their use of Harsh Discipline (e.g., yelling and spanking) and Inconsistent Discipline (e.g., following through with discipline). Parents also reported improvements in their use of Positive Parenting (e.g., praising or complimenting the child and providing extra privileges for doing a good job) and using Clear Expectations (e.g., communicating clear rule or expectations about bed time, doing chores, etc.). Table 2 below shows that progress was made in multiple areas.

Outcome	Pre-Program	Post-Program
Harsh Discipline	2.6	1.7
Inconsistent Discipline	2.9	2.2
Positive Parenting	4.6	5.6
Clear Expectations	5.2	5.9

Scores can range from 1 to 7 on the Parent Practices Interview tool. Progress is indicated when negative parenting scores go down and positive parenting scores go up.

Lessons Learned

The two year pilot program in Durham provided some valuable lessons about the *Incredible Years Program* that will be important for all future work.

- **Build upon local expertise.** Using the two existing, well-respected parent programs (Welcome Baby and Healthy Families) allowed the pilot to get off to a quick start in

terms of recruiting and enrolling families. Families knew and trusted these agencies and were willing to try a new program to manage their children’s challenging behaviors.

- **Provide extra child care support.** Child care and meals were essential components of the program’s success and made it possible for parents to attend the weekly meetings. The child care was delivered by trained teachers who have experience in managing children with challenging behaviors.
- **Develop a pool of qualified trainers.** The *Incredible Years* is an expensive parent training program and requires trained facilitators who have experience in teaching this particular model. It would be advantageous to develop a “pool” of trained group leaders to continuously provide this program in the event of staff turnover.

Parent Success Story

“When I came to this class I wanted help with my daughter who was kicking, lying, hitting and throwing fits at home and at school. During the course of these classes, I learned skills that I now use at home. The change in my daughter at home and at preschool is only short of a miracle.

I have patience and skills other than yelling and corporal punishment. I am able to hear and share with other parents. I realize I am not alone.”

Future Directions

The *Incredible Years* pilot program in both North Carolina and in Durham County has proven its value as a successful parent training program. The results locally are similar to previous national studies and demonstrate the benefit of replicating model programs. These results gave funders confidence that their investments will produce positive results for children and families and increase children’s school readiness and later success. Despite difficult economic times, the success of the pilot program led the North Carolina Partnership for Children to provide partial continuation pilot funding for a third year, with Durham’s Partnership for Children contributing additional funding through its own Smart Start resources.

Both the Welcome Baby and Healthy Families Durham programs have leveraged the initial pilot funding and success to sustain and expand the program in the future. The agencies were awarded new state and foundation grants that provide financial resources for the continuation and expansion of the program. A new component—the *Incredible Years* Baby Program which focuses on parents with new babies – will be available at new sites including the east side of the county.

As a result, the *Incredible Years* will continue to serve Durham County’s children and families in future years, creating more nurturing and successful families which ultimately will benefit the entire community.

For more information about the Incredible Years Program in Durham, please contact Welcome Baby at Durham Cooperative Extension:

**Welcome Baby
721 Foster Street
Durham, NC 27701
(919) 560-7341
www.welcomebaby.org**

We would like to thank the North Carolina Partnership for Children and Duke Energy for providing funding for the Incredible Years pilot project in Durham through Durham's Partnership for Children, a Smart Start Initiative.

Endnotes

¹ Foundation for Child Development. (2005) *Preschools left behind: Expulsion rates in state pre-kindergarten systems. Action for Children NC (2007). Short-term suspensions; long-term consequences; real life solutions.*

² "Early onset" of conduct disorders (in the form of high rates of oppositional defiance, aggressive and noncompliant behaviors) is a stable trait over time for many preschool children and appears to be the most important behavioral risk factor for antisocial behavior for boys and girls in adolescence. Such behavior has repeatedly been found to predict the development of drug abuse in adolescence (Brook, Whiteman, Gordon, & Cohen, 1986; Dishion, Patterson, Stoolmiller, & Skinner, 1991), as well as other problems, including juvenile delinquency, depression, violent behavior, and school dropout (Kazdin, 1985).

³ Research has shown that the relationship between harsh discipline and externalizing problems occurs only among children in homes in which a warm child-parent relationship is lacking (Deater-Deckard, Dodge, Bates, & Pettit, 1996). Likewise, in research on risk and resilience, Doll and Lyon (1998) conclude that a warm relationship with at least one caregiver is a strong protective factor against the negative influences of family dysfunction. Results of a large national study of adolescent development that showed that youth who report positive relationships and bonding with their families and schools engage in less risky and fewer antisocial behaviors (Resnick et al., 1997).