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Stepping Stones Triple P: The theoretical Basis and Development of an Evidence-Based Positive Parenting Program for Families with a Child who has a Disability

Matthew R. Sanders¹, Trevor G. Mazzucchelli², and Lisa J. Studman².

1.1 Aim

Stepping Stones Triple P (SSTP) is the first in a series of programs based on the Triple P – Positive Parenting Program that has been specifically designed for families who have a child with a disability. This paper presents the rationale, theoretical foundations, historical development and distinguishing features of the program. The multi-level intervention adopts a self-regulation framework in consulting with parents that involves the promotion of parental self-sufficiency, self-efficacy, self-management skills, personal agency and problem-solving skills.

2.1 Rationale for the development of Stepping Stones Triple P

The rationale for the development of SSTP relates both to prevalence of serious behaviour difficulties in children with a disability and the consequent stress on caregivers. The duality of developmental and behavioural problems creates difficulties on a number of levels. The parents and siblings of children with both disability and disruptive behaviour problems report experiencing substantial levels of stress (Cuijpers, 1999). The presence of behaviour problems has also been identified as having a strong influence on parent's decisions to find out-of-home placement. At a community level, problem behaviours in people with developmental disabilities result in the use of more resources from multiple agencies, and more intense and costly interventions such as institutionalisation.

3.1 What is Stepping Stones Triple P?

The SSTP model has 5 levels of intervention strength designed to cater for the differing levels of support families require. Triple P principles of parenting are explored throughout the program and include: ensuring a safe, interesting environment; creating a positive learning environment; using assertive discipline; having realistic expectations; and taking care of oneself as a parent. Two additional principles related to parenting a child with a disability are explored in SSTP. They are family adaptation to having a child with a disability and being part of the community.

SSTP aims to: (1) increase parent's competence in managing common behaviour problems and developmental issues found among children with disabilities; (2) reduce parents' use of coercive and punitive methods of disciplining children; (3) improve parents' personal coping skills and reduce parenting stress; (4) improve parents' communication about parenting issues and help parents support one another in their parenting roles; and (5) develop parents' independent problem-solving skills.

4.1 Summary and implications

SSTP involves the application of a self-regulation framework to an active skills-based approach to train parents to change parenting behaviours and practices. The approach aims to build the skills and competencies of both parents and through them their children to deal with common everyday situations. The program has been evaluated in two randomised controlled trials that have demonstrated the value of the approach in reducing behavioural problems in children. Further research examining the social acceptability of the various parenting strategies used in SSTP is being undertaken, as is research to examine the effects of the program when delivered on a group basis.

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