



Online Programs as Tools to Improve Parenting

Can online programs improve parenting?

The answer is “Yes”.

Since the Internet became widely available in 1995, parenting professionals have increasingly used online technology to offer resources for parents. This includes programs to improve parenting competencies, resources for learning, modelling and support.

Visitor numbers to parenting websites run as high as hundreds of thousands per month.

Although web-based services have been claimed to hold promise for parent support, a meta-analytic review (contrasting and combining results from different studies) of online parenting

interventions had not been undertaken. So researchers from the University of Amsterdam conducted a systematic review of studies published between 2000 and 2010, that describe parenting programs of which the primary components were delivered online.

Findings confirmed that the Internet is not only a source of information, but it can also be an instrument for support and training. A preliminary conclusion on the basis of this small sample is that knowledge can be improved by self-guided web-based training programs, while changes in attitude and behaviour may be encouraged through internet interventions, intensively guided by therapists or coaches.

KEY FINDINGS

- In spite of the fact that family communication is a very complex set of knowledge, attitudes and behaviours, the study showed that participation in a short web-based intervention may lead to beneficial changes in both parents and children.

- Not only knowledge can be enhanced, but also attitudinal and behavioural aspects of parenting (including enhancing parenting skills) can be influenced by online programs.
- Web-based parenting programs add to the diversity of parenting support and education.
- Online parenting programs have the potential to be directed at a large population, offer peer and professional support and make use of new technologies.

THINGS YOU CAN DO

- ✓ Browse the Internet for parenting web sites of quality.
- ✓ Ensure that information on parenting web sites is provided by qualified professionals in the field of parenting and child development.
- ✓ Sign up for regular updates – blogs, parenting forums, e-newsletters etc.
- ✓ Regularly browse for reviews of new books and articles on parenting.
- ✓ Check out parenting seminars, workshops, lectures and talks in your local area.

Source: Online programs as tools to improve parenting: A meta-analytic review (CC Nieuwboer, RG Fukkink, JMA Hermans), Children and Youth Services Review 35 (2013) pp 1823-1829.



TAKEAWAY

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Results show that web-based parenting programs with new technologies offer opportunities for sharing social support, consulting professionals and training parental competencies. These meta-analytic results show that guided and self-guided online interventions can make a significant positive contribution for parents and children.