

Evidence-Based Parent Training Programs for those Raising a K-5 Student*

During the foundational elementary (K–5) years, home and school environments are particularly influential in shaping children’s academic, behavioral, and social-emotional development (Doyle, et al., 2023; Epstein, 1995; Henderson & Mapp, 2002). Research consistently links ineffective, inconsistent, and/or overlyharsh parenting to child behavior problems. Some students act out unexpectedly, withdraw from learning, or struggle with strong emotions that disrupt their focus and the learning environment.

Schools tend to respond to student difficulties in reactive and fragmented ways that often do not address underlying causes (Durlak et al., 2011; McAloon & Mastrillo Armstrong 2024; Opie, et al., 2024; Sheridan & Kim, 2015). When poor parenting is identified as a significant causal factor, *Evidence-Based Parent Training* (EBPT) programs are offered as a research-supported pathway for improving parenting efficacy, promoting positive child academic and mental health outcomes, and fostering more consistent home and school connections (Dadisman, et al., 2024; Forgatch et al., 2013; Kazdin, 2017; Sanders et al., 2014; Webster-Stratton, 2001).

What Are EBPTs and What Do They Do?

Evidence-Based Parent Training (EBPT) programs are research-supported approaches that help strengthen parenting and improve family interactions. They are intended to:

- Build positive, consistent parenting practices
- Reduce ineffective or harsh discipline patterns
- Support children’s behavior, learning, and emotional growth
- Align home and school approaches

While EBPTs can be used across ages, this resource focuses on K-5. Moreover, it should be noted that while these programs were developed with parents in mind, in many situations, what is being taught is relevant for anyone in the home who is influencing the youngster’s life. In some cases, grandparents, aunts, older siblings, “nannies,” and foster homes have assumed parental and caretaking roles. Thus, schools and communities must go beyond focusing on parents in their efforts to enhance involvement and engagement of the most significant people in a student’s home situation.

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Exhibit: EBPT Program Comparison Chart (K–5 Focus)				
Program	Best Fit / Age Range	Strengths (Pros)	Limitations (Cons)	Evidence Strength for K–5
<i>Incredible Years (IY)</i>	Ages 3–8	Prevention-focused; strong school alignment; improves behavior and social skills	Requires trained facilitators; scheduling groups can be difficult	Very Strong
<i>Triple P</i>	Birth–12	Multi-tiered; flexible delivery; highly scalable	Effectiveness varies by level; less depth at universal tiers	Strong
<i>PCIT</i>	Ages 2–7	Highly effective for behavior problems; real-time coaching	Resource-intensive; less scalable	Very Strong (Clinical)
<i>PMTO</i>	Ages 4–12	Targets coercive parenting; strong for high-risk families	Less suitable for universal use; more targeted	Strong (Targeted)
<i>Chicago Parent Program (CPP)</i>	Ages 2–8	Culturally responsive; strong engagement	Smaller evidence base; less widely scaled	Moderate–Strong

Punitive and Authoritarian Practices

Parenting approaches that rely on harsh discipline, strict control, and low warmth can negatively affect children’s development. Research links these practices to:

- Lower self-esteem
- Poor emotional regulation
- Increased aggression
- Reduced motivation in school

Although EBPTs are designed to address these patterns, access and participation remain challenges. Parenting support is often introduced only during crises – such as involvement with child protective services – which can create stigma and discourage families from engaging.

What helps:

- Presenting support as a preventive, everyday resource
- Offering “soft-entry” opportunities through schools
- Reaching all families, not just those in crisis

When thoughtfully framed, EBPTs can normalize support and increase participation, helping more families benefit.

Current School Practices and Policies

Many school approaches to behavioral and developmental concerns remain reactive, stepping in only after problems have escalated. This “wait-to-fail” model limits long-term impact and can disproportionately affect students experiencing inconsistent or high-stress home environments.

Current family engagement practices often rely on referral-based systems that feel stigmatizing and deficit-focused. As a result, families – especially those who could benefit most – may be less likely to participate in supports like EBPTs.

Additional barriers include:

- *Limited access*: Parenting supports are often tied to crisis systems rather than early, preventive use
- *Policy constraints*: Insurance rules may require a child’s presence, restricting parent-focused services
- *Fragmented systems*: Differences in coverage and location create uneven access

Together, these factors prevent EBPTs from being used as early, low-barrier supports for all families, limiting their overall impact.

Moving Toward Effective Solutions

Shifting from reactive to preventive approaches requires changes in both practice and policy.

Key strategies are designed to strengthen school-family partnerships. For example:

- *Adopt early, preventive models*: Offer EBPTs before problems escalate
- *Normalize participation*: Frame parenting support as a common, proactive resource
- *Start with familiar settings*: Introduce practices at school and community events
- *Align expectations and supports across home and classroom*
- *Expand access*: Remove barriers tied to insurance, location, eligibility, etc.
- *Scale through universal approaches*: Provide support broadly, with added intensity based on need

Beyond Just Offering Parent Training

By ensuring that evidence-based parent training programs (EBPTs) are accessible, stigma-free, and widely available, schools and communities can significantly strengthen their student/learning support system – enhancing both immediate school success and long-term outcomes.

At the same time, a school’s relationship with the home must extend far beyond simply offering educational opportunities for caregivers (Sempeles & Cui, 2024; Wolfe, Wang, & Master, 2023). Such programs are only one facet of a broader, ongoing effort to promote meaningful home involvement and authentic engagement in both student learning and school success.

Effective home engagement requires building genuine partnerships with families and other caretakers – relationships that acknowledge and address longstanding inequities in power, resources, and access. This includes a strong emphasis on empowering families and communities, particularly those in underserved and economically disadvantaged neighborhoods.

Moving Forward

As with students, caretakers vary widely in their motivation, readiness, and capacity to engage. For some families – especially those whose youngsters are struggling – (re)establishing productive relationships with the school may require deliberate, personalized efforts to address psychosocial, cultural, and practical barriers. Engagement is not a one-size-fits-all process; it must be differentiated and responsive.

Proactive outreach from schools is therefore essential. Equally important is the systematic identification and reduction of barriers that limit meaningful participation. Engagement strategies must be designed to address a full continuum – from families who are ready and able to participate to those who may feel disconnected, distrustful, overwhelmed, or reluctant to engage.

Enhancing home involvement calls for a comprehensive approach that reaches all caregivers and embeds this domain into a unified, equitable system of student/learning supports. Such a system should integrate:

- Schoolwide and classroom-based initiatives that strengthen the home-school connection
- Efforts to enhance family problem-solving and coping capacities
- Supports that increase families' ability to promote student development, learning, and well-being
- Strategies that build stronger, more reciprocal relationships among schools, families, and communities

To advance this work, it is essential to:

- Broaden the focus beyond “parents” to include the full range of caretakers and family structures
- Expand strategies for engagement, with particular attention to homes of students who are struggling and those who are disengaged or hesitant
- Systematically address barriers to participation, using personalized and culturally responsive approaches
- Transform policy and practice so that home involvement and engagement are fully integrated into a unified, comprehensive, and equitable system for addressing barriers to learning and teaching

Concluding Comments

While EBPTs can be a valuable part of strengthening the school's role in supporting a student's equity of opportunity, their impact will be much greater if they are embedded into efforts to enhance home involvement and engagement with the school.

For more on this, see:

>Home Involvement, Engagement, and Re-engagement in Schooling

>Student/Learning Supports: A Brief Guide for Moving in New Directions

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