

// Foundations

What Works Centre for Children & Families

WHY WE NEED EFFECTIVE PARENTING SUPPORT

Steph Fletcher (she/her)

Evidence and Evaluation Officer



PLAN FOR TODAY

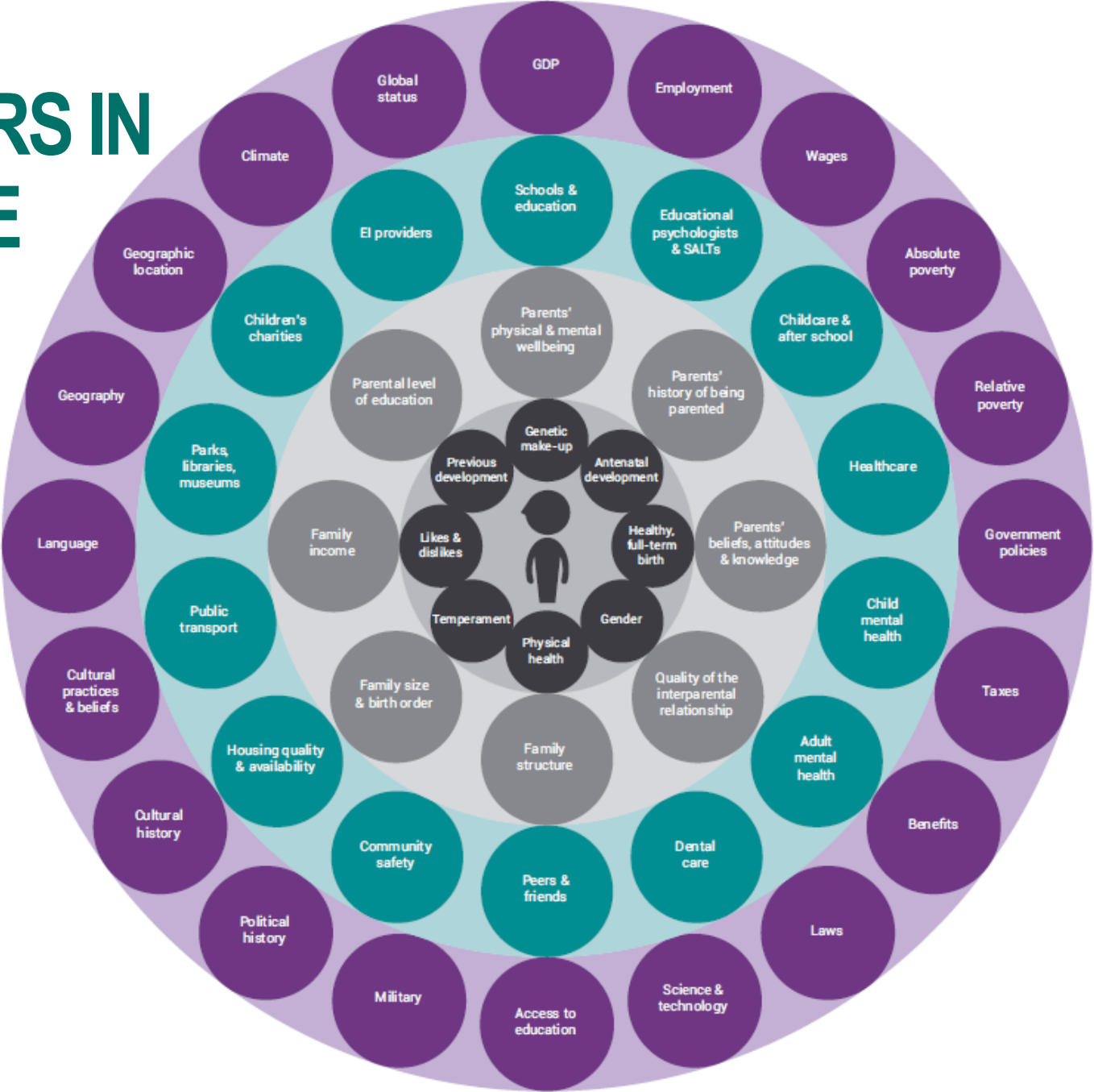


- What risks or challenges might families encounter that affect children's development?
- How can parenting support help children and families?
- What makes a parenting intervention effective, and how do they impact outcomes for children and parents?
- How can we improve access to parenting support for families from minoritized ethnic backgrounds?

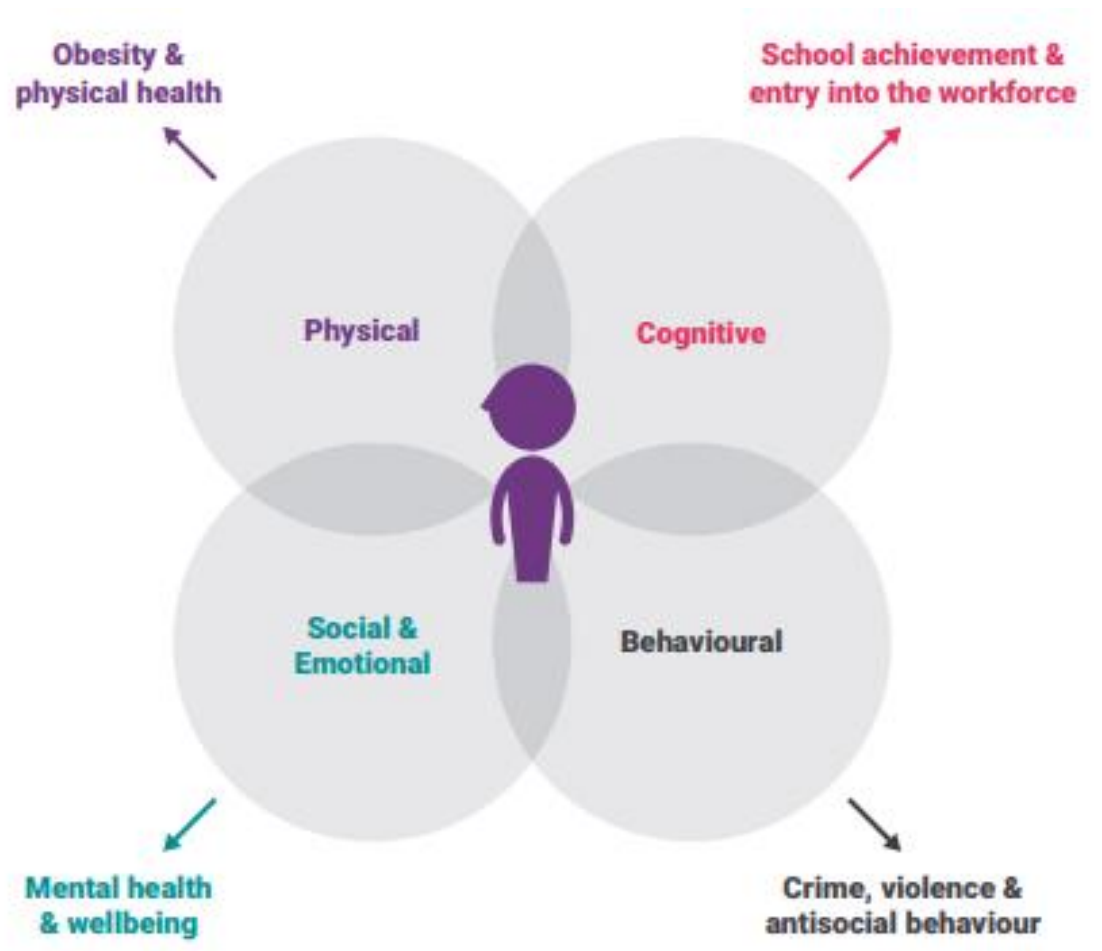


RISKS AND CHALLENGES FACING CHILDREN AND FAMILIES

RISKS FACTORS IN A CHILD'S LIFE



RISKS FACTORS IN A CHILD'S LIFE



CHALLENGES FACING OUR FAMILIES



Based on your experience and knowledge, what are some common reasons why families might seek help with parenting?

Please write your answers in the chat.

CHALLENGES FACING OUR FAMILIES



Family poverty



Parental leave



Access to ECEC



Fragmented
service delivery

Research Article

Supporting parents with young children in Ireland: context, policies and research-supported interventions

Catarina Leitão  

EFFECTS OF THE COVID PANDEMIC



- The evidence suggests that the COVID-19 pandemic increased parenting stress in families, impacting:
 - Child externalising behaviors (aggression, conduct problems)
 - Child internalising behaviors (depression, anxiety)
 - Negative parenting behaviors
 - Parental mental health
 - Parent-child relationship quality

Parenting stress and its impact on parental and child functioning during the COVID-19 pandemic: A meta-analytical review.

 EXPORT  Add To My List    Request Permissions  

Database: APA PsycArticles

Journal Article

EFFECTS OF THE COVID PANDEMIC



- Decrease in 2 and 5 year olds meeting statutory developmental milestones
- Children from disadvantaged backgrounds disproportionately affected

INQ000587957 – Expert report for the UK Covid-19 Public Inquiry by Prof Catherine Davies and Ivana La Valle titled Little Lives, Big Changes: How Covid-19 Shaped Early Years Services and Children’s Development from Birth to Five Years, dated 01/08/2025.

Published: 30 September 2025

Adduced: 30 September 2025, 8 October 2025

Type: Evidence

Module: Module 8

ANY QUESTIONS?



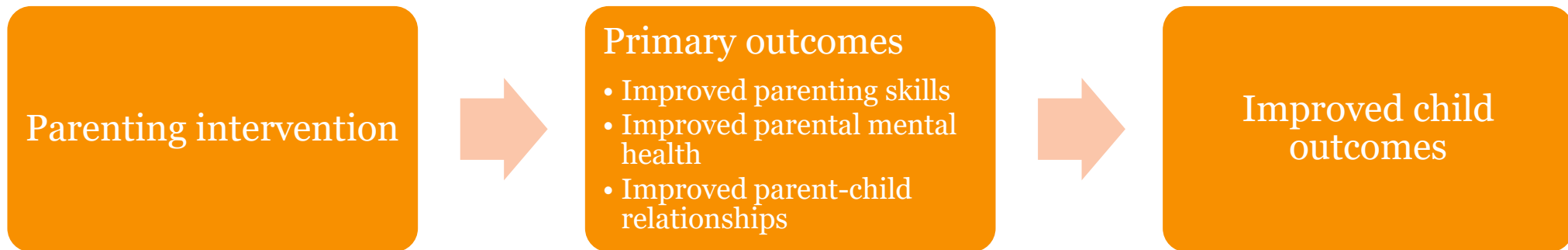


HOW CAN PARENTING SUPPORT HELP CHILDREN AND FAMILIES

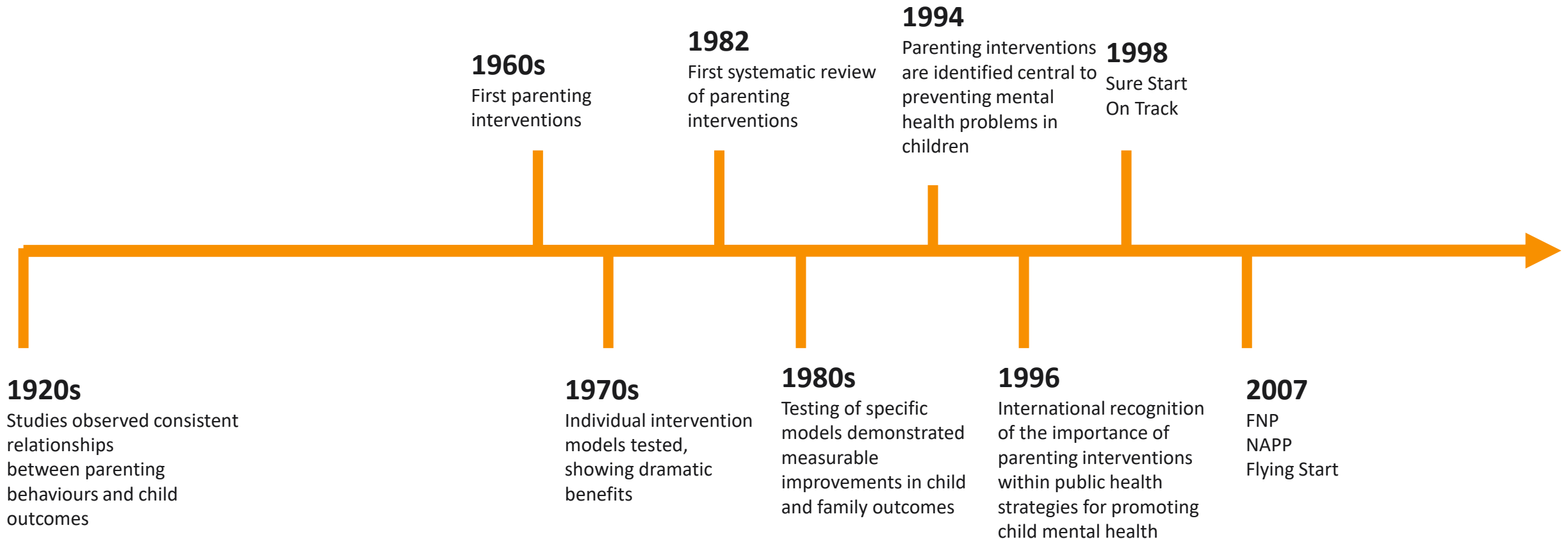
WHY DOES PARENTING MATTER?



BECAUSE THE EVIDENCE SAYS IT WORKS!



A BRIEF HISTORY OF PARENTING INTERVENTIONS



PARENTING THROUGH ADVERSITY

Parents of babies and children 0 to 10



Parenting Through Adversity Practice Guide (0–10)

This Practice Guide sets out key principles and recommendations on parenting support for who have babies and children aged between 0 and 10 years old, based on the best available evidence.

Practice Guides translate the strongest available evidence into actionable recommendations to support local leaders in strengthening family services.

Practice Guides are based on systematic reviews of existing evidence that explore what works, for whom, and in what context.

Quantitative systematic review

Rapid qualitative evidence synthesis

PARENTING KNOWLEDGE AND SKILLS



Parenting through adversity 0-10 Practice Guide:

“Make evidence-based
parenting interventions
available to families to
improve child behaviour and
effective parenting
practices”

[Strong Evidence of impact]

Negative parenting practices: overly harsh, punitive or inconsistent behaviours towards the child or distant and emotionally unresponsive behaviours towards the child

Positive parenting practices: sensitive, warm, and nurturing parenting and parent-child interactions led by the child, sometimes expressed as ‘serve and return’ interactions

PARENTAL MENTAL HEALTH



Parenting through adversity 0-10 Practice Guide:

“Make evidence-based
parenting interventions
available to reduce levels of
parenting stress and support
parental mental health”

[Strong Evidence of impact]

- Parenting interventions **support parental mental health** by enabling parents to **reflect on their experiences** and **build on parenting skills**, and by **strengthening parent-child relationships**
- Where parents have **untreated mental health problems**, parenting interventions work well to **improve child and parenting outcomes**

PARENTAL MENTAL HEALTH



Child First

Child First is a therapeutic, home-based intervention targeted at infants/toddlers/children aged 0 to 5 years old who are at risk of developmental delay, abuse and neglect, and emotional problems. The intervention aims to provide a tailored package of support to meet the unique needs of families. This case study highlights the importance of targeted early support for families facing adversity, with a child at risk of developmental delay, abuse and neglect.

[READ MORE](#)



PARENT-CHILD RELATIONSHIPS



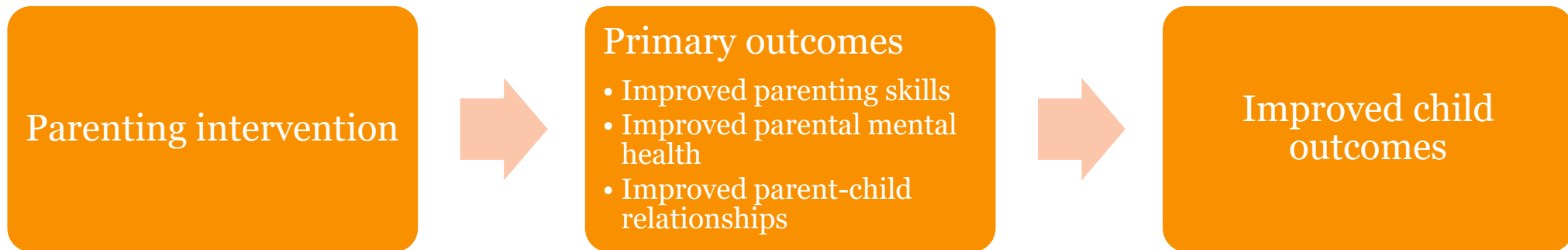
Parenting through adversity 0-10 Practice Guide:

“Make evidence-based
parenting interventions
available to families with a
child aged 0 to 3 years to
strengthen parent-child
relationships”

[Strong Evidence of impact]

- Typically, interventions that strengthen parent-child relationships are underpinned by **Social Learning Theory** and/or **Attachment Theory**, and the science of early child development
- Interventions focused on parent-child relationships are usually not in a fixed schedule, instead **working around the individual needs of the primary caregiver**

BUT WHAT ABOUT THE CHILD OUTCOMES?



CHILD OUTCOMES



Family Check-Up for Children

Positive Parenting Pathways

Level 5 Pathways Triple P

Strengthening Families 10-14

Parents as First Teachers



Guidebook

Child-Parent Psychotherapy

Family Foundations

What Works Ireland Evidence Hub



Family Nurse Partnership (FNP)

Multidimensional Family Therapy

CHILD OUTCOMES



Parents as First Teachers

Parents as First Teachers (PAFT) is a home visiting intervention for disadvantaged families with a child aged 3 and younger. It is delivered by practitioners to individual families in their home on a weekly, fortnightly, or monthly basis depending on the family's level of need. The intervention typically begins during the child's first year and then continues until the child's third birthday. During the visits, parents learn strategies for supporting their child's early development and school readiness.

[READ MORE](#)

Evidence rating:  ?

Cost rating:  ?

Child outcomes:

- Enhancing school achievement & employment
 - Improved mastery motivation
 - Improved speech, language and communication
- Preventing crime, violence and antisocial behaviour
 - Improved behaviour
 - Reduced hyperactivity
- Preventing obesity and promoting healthy physical development
 - Improved child self-help skills (including sleep)
 - Improved developmental milestones
- Supporting children's mental health and wellbeing
 - Improved emotional wellbeing

[Quick view](#) +

Level 5 Pathways Triple P

Level 5 Pathways Triple P is a parenting intervention for parents who have difficulty regulating their emotions and may be at risk of physically or emotionally harming their child. The intervention is delivered by a Triple P practitioner to families individually over five sessions (lasting 60 to 90 minutes), or to groups of parents over four sessions (lasting 120 minutes) supplemented by four individual telephone sessions.

[READ MORE](#)

Evidence rating:  ?

Cost rating:  ?

Child outcomes:

- Preventing child maltreatment
 - Reduced child maltreatment risk
- Preventing crime, violence and antisocial behaviour
 - Improved behaviour
- Supporting children's mental health and wellbeing
 - Improved emotional wellbeing

Strengthening Families 10–14

Strengthening Families 10–14 (SF 10–14) is for any family with a child between 10 and 14 years old. It is delivered by three trained facilitators (one lead practitioner and two co-practitioners) to groups of between 8 and 12 families through seven weekly sessions lasting two hours each.

[READ MORE](#)

Evidence rating:  ?

Cost rating:  ?

Child outcomes:

- Enhancing school achievement & employment
 - Improved academic performance
- Preventing crime, violence and antisocial behaviour
 - Improved behaviour
 - Reduced antisocial behaviour
- Preventing risky sexual behaviour & teen pregnancy
 - Reduced number of sexual partners
 - Reduced risky sexual behaviour
- Preventing substance abuse
 - Reduced alcohol use
 - Reduced substance misuse
- Supporting children's mental health and wellbeing
 - Improved emotional wellbeing

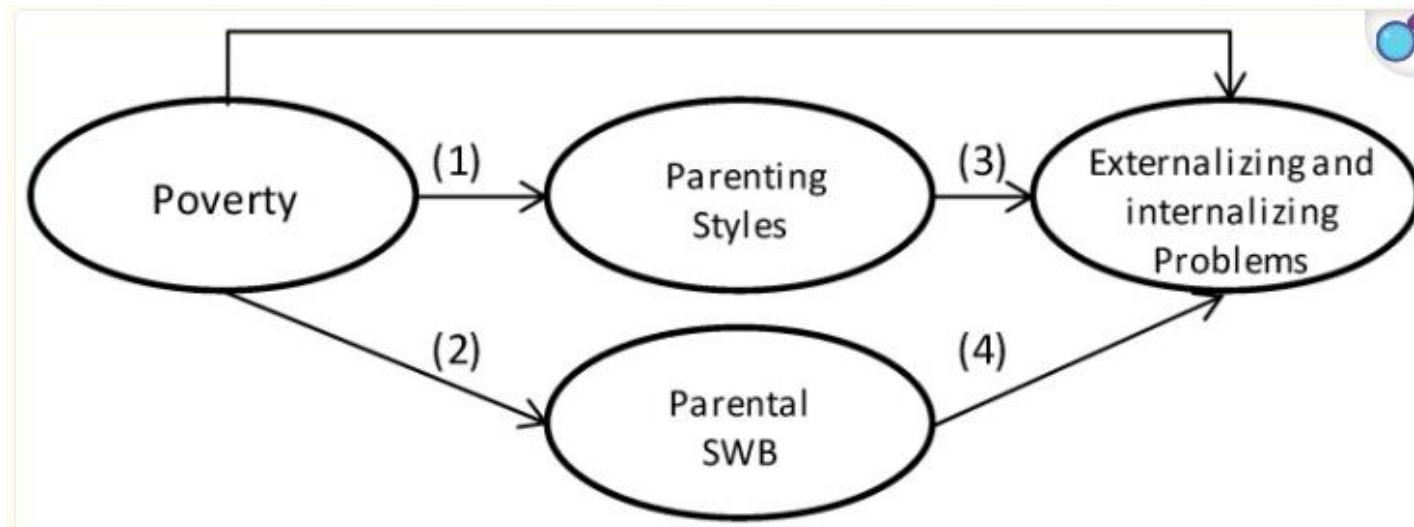
PARENTING AS A PROTECTIVE FACTOR



Effective parenting can protect children from the impact of poverty, and parenting style has been found to be key in the association between child poverty and poor child outcomes

Poverty and Child Behavioral Problems: The Mediating Role of Parenting and Parental Well-Being

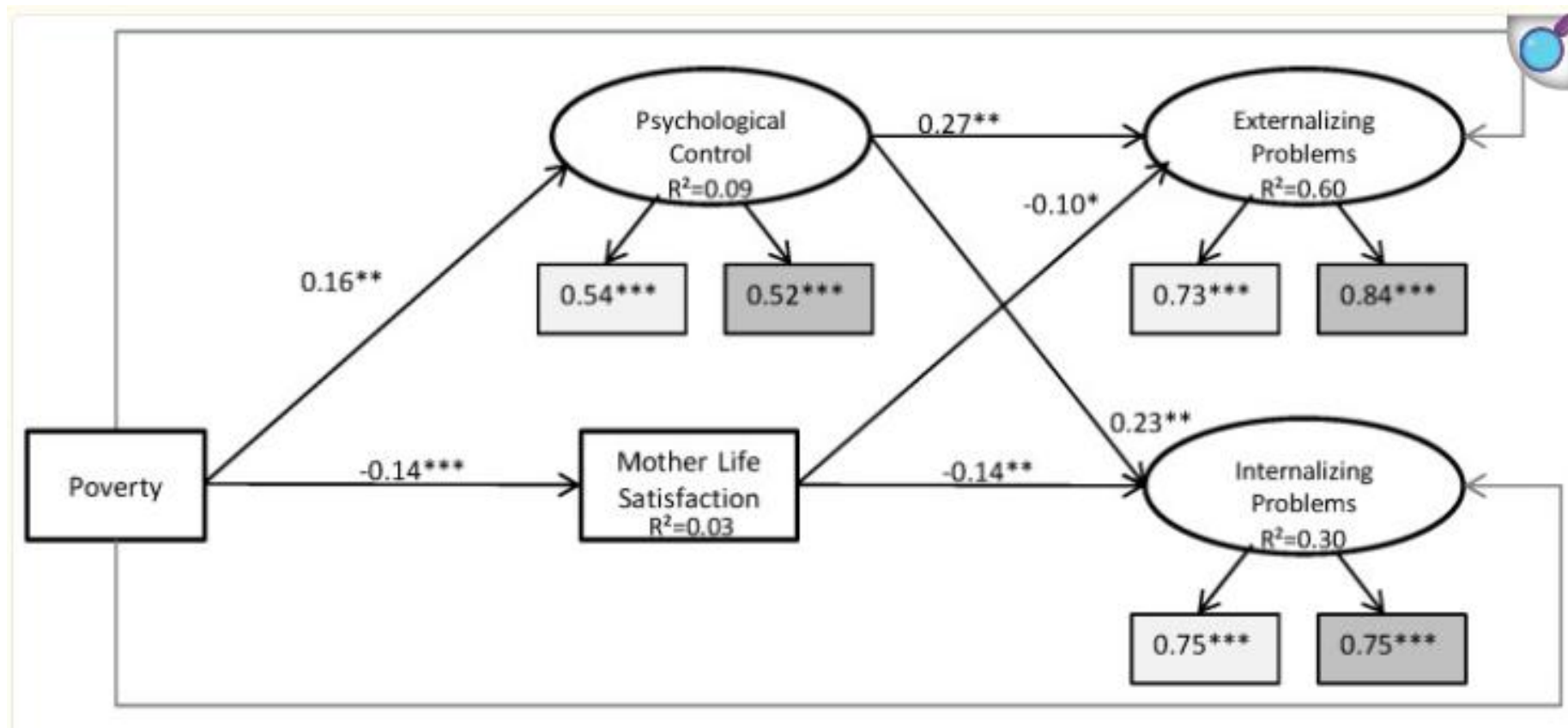
[Till Kaiser](#)^{1,2,*}, [Jianghong Li](#)^{1,3,4}, [Matthias Pollmann-Schult](#)⁵, [Anne Y Song](#)¹



PARENTING AS A PROTECTIVE FACTOR



Effective parenting can protect children from the impact of poverty, and parenting style has been found to be key in the association between child poverty and poor child outcomes



PARENTING AS A PROTECTIVE FACTOR



Effective parenting can protect children from the impact of poverty, and parenting style has been found to be key in the association between child poverty and poor child outcomes

- **Positive parenting** alongside **positive home learning activities** reduces the harmful effects of poverty
- A positive **parent-child relationship** significantly reduces the harmful effects of poverty

Mechanisms that mitigate the effects of child poverty and improve children's cognitive and social-emotional development: A systematic review

Inga Saitadze  | Marina Lalayants 

PARENTING AS A PROTECTIVE FACTOR



Effective parenting can protect children from the impact of poverty, and parenting style has been found to be a key in the association between child poverty and poor child outcomes

Equity effects of parenting interventions for child conduct problems: a pan-European individual participant data meta-analysis

Frances Gardner, Patty Leijten, Victoria Harris, Joanna Mann, Judy Hutchings, Jennifer Beecham, Eva-Maria Bonin, Vashti Berry, Sinead McGilloway, Maria Gaspar, Maria João Seabra-Santos, Bram Orobio de Castro, Ankie Menting, Margiad Williams, Ulf Axberg, Willy-Tore Mørch, Stephen Scott, Sabine Landau**

- **Meta-analysis** of individual data from European trials of **Incredible Years**
- **58%** of children were from **low-income families**
- **No differential effects by family disadvantage**

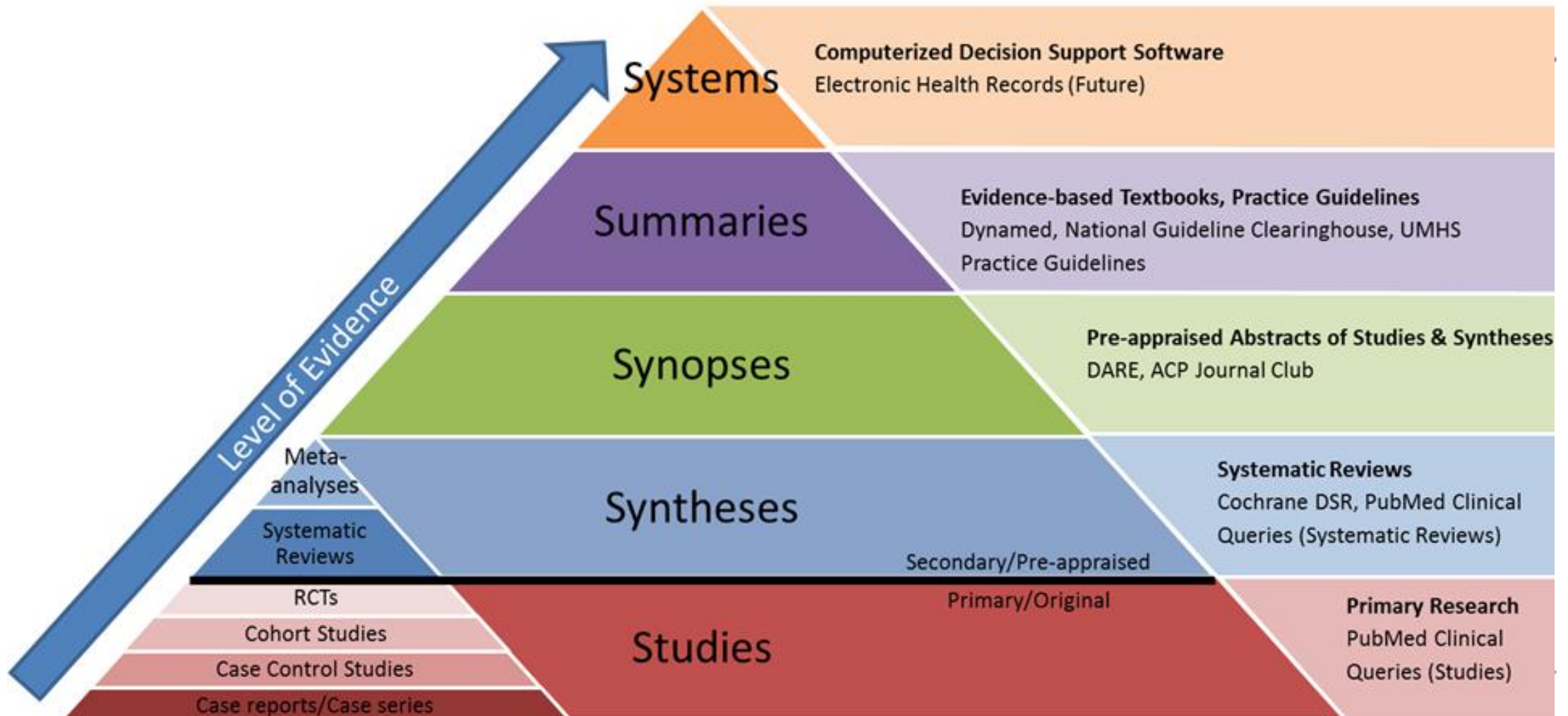
ANY QUESTIONS?





WHAT MAKES PARENTING SUPPORT EFFECTIVE?

THE IMPORTANCE OF EVIDENCE



THE IMPORTANCE OF A THEORY OF CHANGE

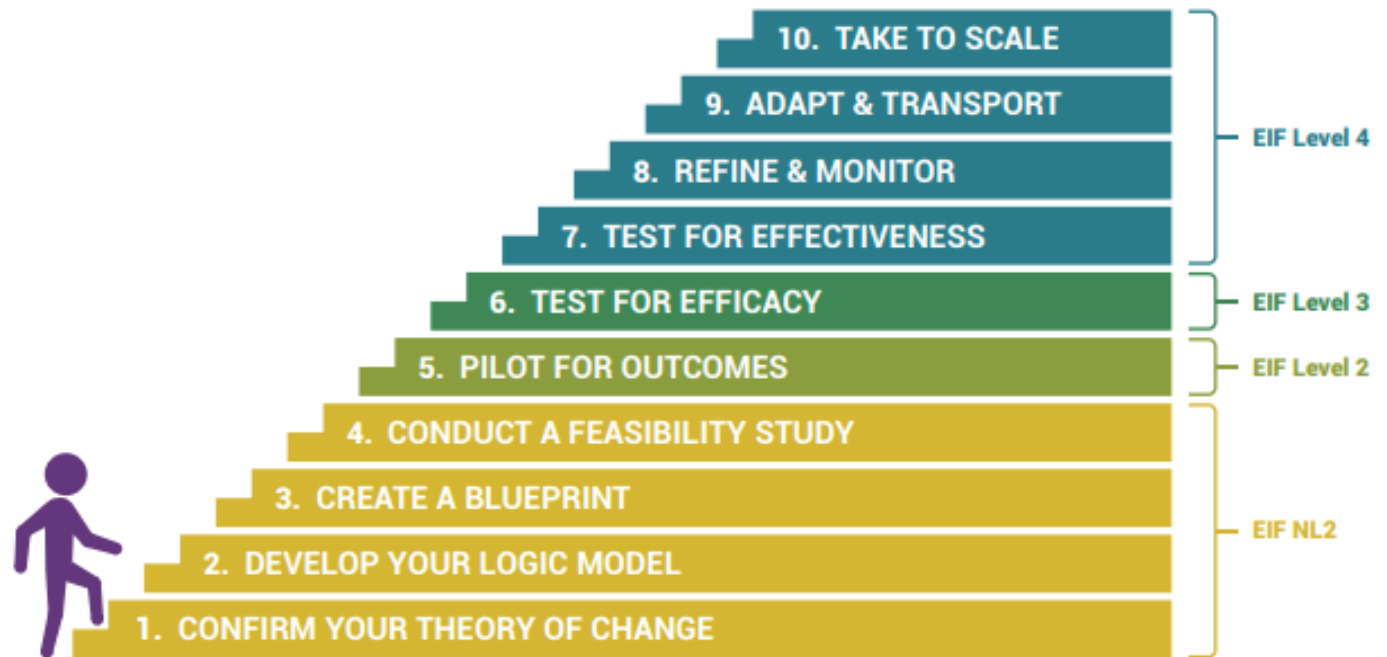


- The best interventions are underpinned by clear theories that can explain why they are needed and how they will work

“There is nothing quite so practical as a good theory” - Kurt Lewin

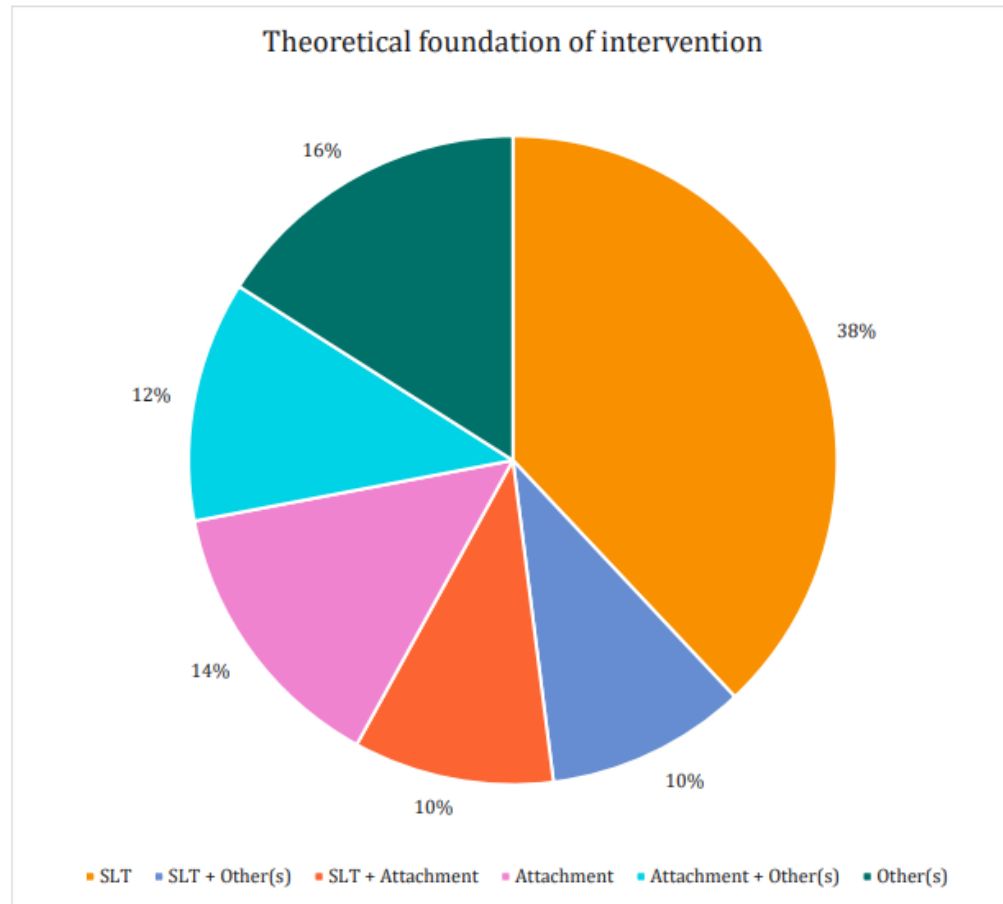
Use the science!

10 STEPS FOR EVALUATION SUCCESS

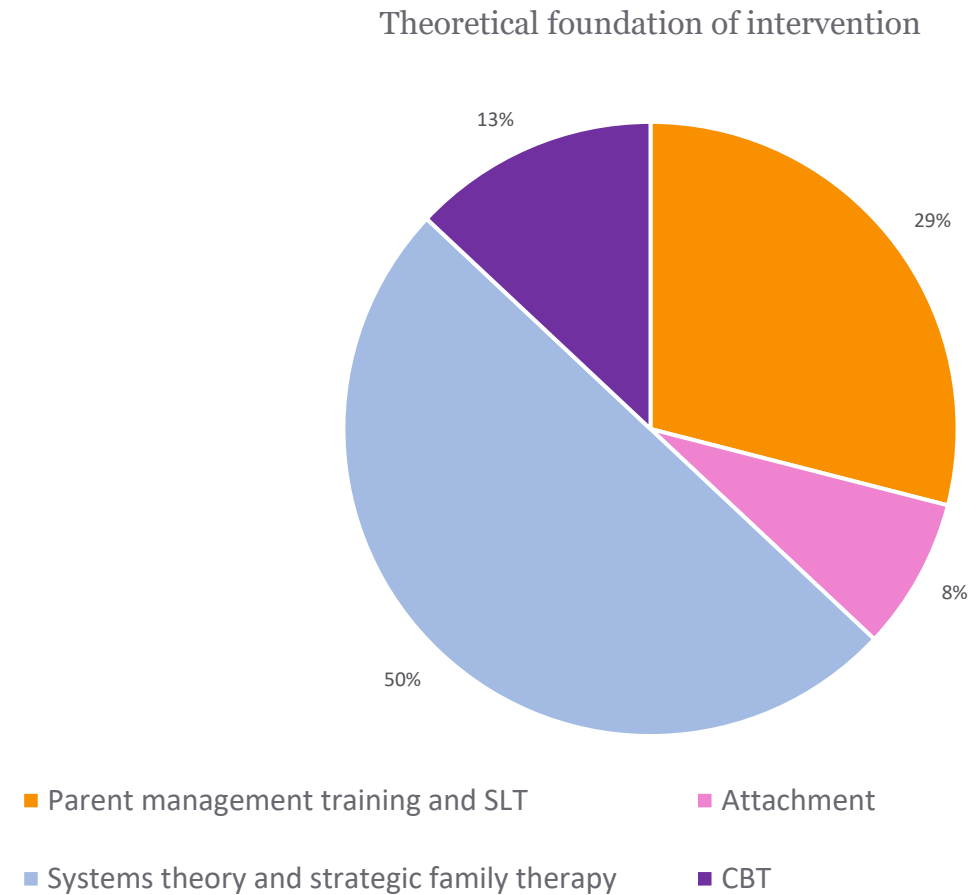


Source: EIF

INTERVENTIONS GROUNDED IN THEORY



0 – 10 year olds



11 – 19 year olds

INTERVENTIONS GROUNDED IN THEORY



SOCIAL LEARNING THEORY

Children learn behaviours by watching and imitating others, especially parents or caregivers.

ATTACHMENT THEORY

A secure attachment, formed through consistent, responsive and nurturing care, helps children feel safe and develop healthy relationships.

SYSTEMS THEORY AND STRATEGIC FAMILY THERAPY

Children's difficulties are not just individual issues but part of broader family dynamics.

PARENT MANAGEMENT TRAINING OREGON



GUIDEBOOK

GENERATION PARENT MANAGEMENT TRAINING OREGON

Look at the theory of change – what is its theoretical basis?

Look at its evidence rating – what is the evidence rating? What does this mean?

Which children and families is the intervention aimed at?

What child outcomes are improved by the intervention?

EFFECTIVE PARENTING INTERVENTIONS – INTERVENTION COMPONENTS



Meta-Analyses: Key Parenting Program Components for Disruptive Child Behavior

Patty Leijten¹, Frances Gardner², G J Melendez-Torres³, Jolien van Aar⁴, Judy Hutchings⁵,
Susanne Schulz⁶, Wendy Knerr⁷, Geertjan Overbeek⁴

- Parenting intervention effects increased with level of prevention, with greater effects for interventions targeting higher levels of need
- Intervention components associated with larger effects were:
 - Positive reinforcement (general)
 - Positive reinforcement – praise
 - Use of natural or logical consequences

A COUPLE OF QUESTIONS...



What do you think is most important to consider when choosing and implementing an evidence-based parenting intervention?

Why do you think this is important?

EFFECTIVE PARENTING INTERVENTIONS



- Tailor parenting support to ages and stages of child development
- Use strengths-based approaches to engage parents

Parenting interventions
work particularly well for
parents most in need

EFFECTIVE PARENTING INTERVENTIONS – INTERVENTION DELIVERY



For parents facing adversity:

- Offer parenting support across the end-to-end system of support
- Prioritise **face-to-face delivery**
- Implement **both fixed and flexible delivery models**, prioritizing more **structured interventions** to effectively reduce the **risk of serious harm** to children
- Tailor local programmes to **meet the specific needs of families**, offering both group and individual options to support engagement and provide parents with choice
- Focus on careful implementation, effective delivery, and ongoing quality assurance

WHAT WORKS TO SUPPORT MINORITISED FAMILIES



CONTEXT:

- Impacts on parenting outcomes were stronger in interventions that included more than 50% of parents from minoritized ethnic groups
- Lack of cultural sensitivity, conscious/unconscious bias and racism
- Accessibility barriers

WHAT WORKS?

- Proactive planning considering needs of community
- Work with the community
- Support and equip practitioners

WHAT WORKS TO SUPPORT MINORITISED FAMILIES



Cultural considerations

- Using culturally relevant metaphors and imagery
- Consideration of cultural values and beliefs in intervention content and delivery
- Recruiting staff from the same linguistic and cultural backgrounds as participants

ANY QUESTIONS?



REFLECTION QUESTIONS



- What is your main takeaway from today's session?
- Is there anything you took from this session that you might apply in your practice?
- What do you consider most important in making a parenting intervention effective, and why?



THANK YOU!