

EPEC – Empowering parents, empowering communities

“I have loved, loved this group ... I will leave here today with all the tools in my kit to be a great Mum”

Parent facilitators at the House of Lords



Background

EPEC– Empowering Parents, Empowering Communities – is a community-based programme, training local parents to run parenting groups in schools and children’s centres. Developed in Southwark over the last ten years, the programme has received a national Sure Start award for innovation and user involvement. The model assumes that parents find it less stigmatizing and more supportive to attend parenting groups run by local people, who are in very similar circumstances to themselves.

Parent facilitators undergo a 10 –week (60 hour) training and then go on to engage and encourage other local parents to attend a manualised eight-week (16 hour) course – *Being a Parent*.

The programme is supported by the EPEC team, who give advice on venues, childcare and outreach, provide training, supervision, publicity and materials and conduct the research.

A research programme, including a randomized controlled trial, carried out by Institute of Psychiatry/Kings College London between 2009 – 2011, provided evidence that EPEC is an effective parenting intervention, including for “hard-to-reach” parents, showing **significant improvements in positive parenting and child behaviour**, an impressive **retention rate of 91.5%** and high levels of parental satisfaction. Moreover, the size of the improvement in child behaviour compares favourably with outcomes from trials involving professional therapists.



EPEC runs approximately 15 ***Being a Parent*** groups in Southwark each year, and is currently developing work in the London Boroughs of Lambeth and Greenwich. It has recently been funded to roll out the programme across Tasmania and has trained colleagues in Nigeria, Sri Lanka and the West Bank.

Programme principles

The EPEC programme links several important principles in developing effective support for families.

By involving families at every level in the design, implementation and delivery of the programme it ensures that EPEC addresses the real and current concerns of families and delivers them in a friendly, accessible manner. Less stigma is attached to attendance at a programme delivered by members of the local community.

At the same time, parent facilitators are given a thorough, accredited training in the principles of parenting, the practice of groupwork and in professional accountability (including safeguarding responsibilities), which enables them to run groups confidently, and often to go on to further work in the community.

The carefully developed, manualised programme for the Being a Parent course ensures programme fidelity and enables a wide range of parents to access an effective parenting intervention, which includes building parental confidence, understanding behaviour, dealing with feelings, developing communication skills, promoting positive behaviour and setting limits.

Outcomes

Families more confident in their parenting

Increased engagement by marginalised families

Reduction in severity of child behaviour problems

Increase in community resilience