

PSYCHOSOCIAL SUPPORT

Are parenting interventions effective in improving the relationship between mothers and their preterm infants?

Background

Improving the infant's caregiving environment through parenting interventions has been found to improve attachment and relationship outcomes for mother-preterm infant dyads, that in turn have consequences for infant's later development. Given the high numbers of published studies it is necessary to determine the efficacy of parenting intervention in improving interactions between mothers and their preterm infants and to identify important factors of this efficacy.

Summary of results

The review included randomized or quasi-randomized controlled trials (RCT) of parenting interventions for mothers of preterm infants where mother-infant relationship quality outcomes were reported. In the end, seventeen studies met the inclusion criteria; 14 with strong methodological quality. The most effective interventions showing large effect sizes were similar in intensity and duration of sessions and so were offered to parents by several appointments with intensity of at least 30 minutes during hospital stay or a combined hospital and home delivery. All of the eight effective parenting interventions promoted cue-based care and sensitive responsive mothering. So, these interventions enhance the infant's relationship with the mother by helping them to read their infant's cues and especially to show adequate responses to signals of overstimulation.

Strength

Using various databases, like the Cochrane Library, PubMed, CINAHL, PsycInfo and Web of Science, a systematic review was conducted, which focused on papers with RCTs and standardized mother-preterm infant relationship outcome measures.

Limitations

In the end, relevance of the review struggled caused to typical limitations of current research in this field by including studies with small sample sizes, changes to intended delivery mode of the intervention, uneven distribution of neurological impairment between control and intervention groups, and randomization bias.

Practical conclusion

Most potential to increase relationship between mothers and preterm infants and to promote secure attachment processes and further aspects of infant development is given by interventions that focus on cue-based, responsive care. These programs are mostly delivered by nurses. This fact follows the actual debate about a changing role model in professional care in Germany, whereby the increasing importance of nurses' "mentoring" functions for parents compared to their principal "acting" behavior towards the child is discussed.

Evans T., et al. Are parenting interventions effective in improving the relationship between mothers and their preterm infants? *Infant Behavior & Development*, 2014; 37(2), 131–54. doi:10.1016/j.infbeh.2013.12.009

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