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#213 - Adapting our Waitlist Engagement Programme: Our Implementation Journey

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Objectives/aims

Early intervention is so important for children with developmental needs. However, the current wait time for enrolment at early intervention centres in Singapore can take as long as 24 months or more, due to the increasing demand for early intervention services. During this time, children receive little or no support, which can cause stress and frustration in parents.

We studied an evidence-based NBDI parent-mediated intervention called Project Impact from the US, which is carried out in the community setting over 12 sessions (Ingersoll & Dvortcsak, 2010; Stadnick, Stahmer & Brookman-Frazer, 2015). We adapted this into what we called Waitlist Engagement – Building Blocks of Communication (WE-BBC) programme, as we wanted to engage and coach those parents whose children are on the waitlist. We carried out WE-BBC in 2022 as a pilot project with 13 parent-child dyads in two runs, using play routines as the focus of interaction. Our staff coached parents to enhance and develop specific interaction skills so that parents could in turn help build their child's social communication skills through play. We adopted a tele-practice format to increase ease of access for parents. Another adaptation was that we only focused on an essential set of interaction skills, as parents' initial feedback was that a 12-session course would be too time-consuming for them. Dual-income families are common in Singapore, and parents often work long hours, around 45.8 hours per week (Ministry of Manpower [MOM], 2022), so time is a much-valued resource.



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Through the learning gained from the pilot, we realised that we needed to consider further issues and make more adjustments to the implementation process. For example, we found that parent participants tended to engage in more didactic approaches to play, such as learning the alphabet or counting numbers. Such cultural practices are not uncommon in Asia, where there is a strong societal emphasis on academic learning and preparation for schooling (Bautista, et.al., 2020; Roopnarine, 2011). In our subsequent runs of the programme, we have started with providing parents with a list of play activities and asking them to select (or add) activities that their child enjoys doing. These preferred activities then become part of the play routine.

This presentation reports on these careful adaptations and others we made to the programme, as well as the results from subsequent runs of WE-BBC.

Methods

Parents were administered questionnaires to measure their parenting self-efficacy and child's social communication abilities at three timepoints: start of the programme, end of the programme, and two months after the programme. Parents' fidelity of interaction skills was assessed through short video clips that the parents recorded at home when playing with their child. At the end of the programme, parents were also given a survey to share their feedback about the programme.

Main findings

Parents' fidelity in using the skills increased by the end of coaching, as did their parenting self-efficacy. Parents also rated improvements in their child's social communication abilities, with most children meeting family-led coaching goals by the end of the programme. Parents rated the programme as acceptable to them, with the strongest element being the coaching relationship.

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