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## **Stepping Stones Triple P**

Neurodevelopmental disorders are a group of disorders that can appear during the developmental period of a child (DSM-5, 2013). One of these difficulties is Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD). DSM-5 (2013) gives a clear definition of ASD. According to their definition, ASD is a neurodevelopmental disorder, which influences a child's development. A child diagnosed with ASD might have difficulties with communication, might show ritualistic behaviour and can demonstrate limited interest in normal activities (DSM-5, 2013). In order to understand the nature of ASD research it should be noted that beside basic symptoms, a person with ASD might show additional outcomes, among which is challenging behaviour. This might include uncontrolled demonstrations of anger, internalizing behaviour and aggression. For example, 94% of children with autism might demonstrate at least one of these behaviours (Matson, Wilkins and Macken, 2008). Based on the information above, it might be concluded that children with ASD might struggle not only with core features of the difficulty, but might also face additional challenges, which could cause significant problems.

Challenging behaviour could lead to certain obstacles to day-to-day activities. For example, challenging behaviour might create problems with the social development of the child (Matson and Wilkins, 2007). Moreover, it could be a problem not only for the child but also for the family or caregivers who spend time with these children (Holden and Gitlesen, 2006). Among the challenging behaviours, aggression plays a significant role in causing parental stress (Baker, *et al.*, 2002).

The reasons why children with ASD might behave aggressively can vary. For instance, Kanne and Mazurek (2011) argue that the cause of aggression among children with ASD is unclear. However, Simpson and Myles (1998) claim that the reason could be their difficulties with communication. Moreover, aggressive

behaviour might be seen among those children who struggle with serious indicators of ASD (Matson, Wilkins and Macken, 2008).

Furthermore, aggression could have serious influence on parents life. Meirsschaut, Roeyers and Warreyn (2010) claim that mothers who have a child with ASD typically suffer from a poor social life; they cannot work, and do not have enough free time for themselves because they tend to spend most of their time looking after their child. Besides having limited private lives, parents of such children might face certain additional issues. According to Karst and van Hecke (2012), these parents might feel that they are not competent because it can be a problem for them to recognize their child's the preferences. Also, parents who have children with ASD generally suffer from stress (Estes *et al.*, 2013), and this might lead to poor life standards (Vasilopoulou and Nisbet, 2016). Hence, it is clear that aggression can be a significant issue among children with ASD. Aggressive behaviour can harm not only the child, but also could have a negative impact on their parents.

As a mean of support for parents and their children, early intervention has been suggested (Bate, 2017). Early intervention could help parents to increase their opportunities to support their children in the developmental process, and can also help children to develop the basic skills they need to have full, healthy and successful lives (Early Intervention Foundation, 2018). Moreover, training could help such children to limit the expression of some of their behavioural problems (Sofronoff, Leslie and Brown, 2004). Furthermore, by intervening or identifying the additional features of ASD it becomes possible to help these children to take a full part in society as well as helping their families (Bauman, 2010). As parental stress is commonly observed in families with children who have been diagnosed with ASD (Bouma, Schweitzer, 1990), these programmes could help to raise parents' self-efficacy and could help them to reduce stress (Bloomfield and Kendall, 2012). Thus, it might be emphasised that early intervention can be effective for children diagnosed with ASD and their parents, who will almost certainly spend most of their time looking after their children.

A number of early intervention programs were developed to support parents and their children to overcome the challenging behaviour associated with ASD. One of these programs is the Triple P- Positive Parenting Programme. The Triple P is a programme, which aims to support the parent-child relationship and help parents to find solutions to the behavioural problems of their children (Sanders, 1999). However, there are families with children who have disabilities and these families might need support concerning the behavioural problems of their children. Stepping Stones Triple P is one part of the Triple P programme and was designed to help and support parents whose children have disabilities (Sanders, Mazzucchelli and Studman, 2004). Matt Sanders is the developer of the Triple P programme (Triple P, 2020). In order to implement the programme, he followed behavioural principles and social learning theory (Sanders, 2012).

As mentioned above, the Triple P programme is based on behavioural principles (Sanders, 2012). Sanders (1999) explains that the key figures of the programme are parents and their knowledge about how to up bring their child as well as the relationship between the child and his/her parents.

Behavioural family intervention is an approach which has helped parents to reduce disruptive behaviour amongst typically developing children (Kazdin, 2005); however it can be seen that the same approach works well with children who have developmental problems (Gavidia-Payne and Hudson, 2002). Furthermore, behavioural family intervention was always an essential element of interventions which were focused on reducing child abuse (Chalk and King, 1998). Also, behavioural family treatment was considered an effective approach in reducing a child's disruptive behaviour (Brestan and Eyberg, 1998).

According to Sanders (2008), by providing parents with the necessary knowledge of how to interact with children and raising their confidence in this regard, it will be possible to regulate the challenging behaviour of children as well as preventing developmental problems. This means that if it possible to change some of the parents' behavioural strategies, it could become possible to manage the disruptive behaviour of their children.

Moreover, two different types of parent-child relationship at home can have an impact on a child's development. If to speak about the negative parent-child relationship, this type of relationship could lead to serious developmental problems in the child. For example, as a result of this relationship, a child might have social problems; he/she could develop emotional and behavioural problems (Sanders, 1999). It might be considered that if parents create a positive relationship with their child, he/she might avoid these problems.

To sum up, it might be believed that changing approaches and creating a positive relationship between child and parents could solve some of the behavioural problems a child might have.

There could be a reason why Sanders focussed his attention on parents' behaviour. The reason might be that parents might live for a long time together with their children. For example, if we compare to the parents of typically developing children it could be seen that 17% of parents who are 50 years old or greater live together with their children. However, 50% of parents live together with their children if a child has disabilities (Seltzer, *et al.*, 2001 cited in Karst and van Hecke, 2012).

A number of articles have been published showing the effectiveness of Stepping Stones Triple P, and indeed the following studies number amongst them. Roberts *et al.* (2006) described the effectiveness of SSTP. The study was comprised of 47 families and 51 children with disabilities. The issues of the family were challenging behaviour in the children and parental stress. Before starting the intervention, families tried to find the reasons why their children were misbehaving, themselves, after which they attended seminars where they were taught some of the strategies for managing challenging behaviour. Families worked together with therapists and received commentary and feedback from them on a regular basis. At the end of the study, parents' opinions about the intervention were generally positive. They commonly reported a reduction in their children's misbehaviour and also parents' levels of stress decreased because they were more able to cope with the disruptive behaviour of their children.

The results of the study showed the effectiveness of SSTP, though the reasons for such in each case could well be different. A possible explanation for this is that families had close connections with professionals. They had an opportunity to discuss the strategies, which they used in order to control their children's challenging behaviour. A second explanation is that families from this study had 40 hours of sessions with the person who created the programme (Roberts *et al.*, 2006). This might mean that the direct communication with the author, who showed them other angles to the programme, might extend the knowledge gained by the parents, thus enhancing the effectiveness of SSTP.

The major drawbacks of this study are that the sample size was small, which makes it impossible to generalize the results. Further, family backgrounds were not taken into account and it could be assumed that aspects like motivation, parents' levels of education or families' social economic status might have had an influence on the research results (Roberts *et al.*, 2006).

There are a number of studies, which could demonstrate the effectiveness of the program. The purpose of the current article was to provide an proof about the effectiveness of the Stepping Stones Triple P programme. The aim of the intervention is to support parents in managing the challenging behaviour of children diagnosed with autism.

Based on the information above, the intervention works well and shows positive results in many countries. The first major finding of the research is that the intervention could have a positive influence on disruptive behaviour amongst children. Moreover, this study has shown that in reducing challenging behaviour in their children, parents can increase their self-efficacy.

To sum up, it might be concluded that Autism Spectrum Disorder can have both core and additional symptoms. Among the additional symptoms, challenging behaviour, particularly aggression, can cause problems for both these children and their parents. However, early intervention could be a solution, which might help parents and their children who struggle with autism.

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