

# The Thriving Kids & Parents Schools Project

Can a low-intensity seminar series for parents promote the wellbeing of children and families?

Research findings at a glance

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## In a nutshell

- In 2022 the Australian Government Department of Education Skills and Employment through the Emerging Priorities Program funded us to find out whether a light-touch seminar program, the Thriving Kids and Parents Seminar Series could address the increase in child social, emotional and behavioural problems e.g., anxiety, depression, challenges with school attendance and academic performance that occurred in the after-math of COVID-19.
- COVID-19 is one example of the current global threats to children's mental health. Other potential impacts also include, the climate crisis, war, public health emergencies and social and economic inequalities.
- The Thriving Kids and Parents Seminar Series comprised three Triple P seminars: The Power of Positive Parenting; Helping Your Child Manage Anxiety and Keeping Your Child Safe from Bullying. This seminar series provided parents with the knowledge and skills to support their children's social, emotional and behavioural development.
- The Thriving Kids and Parents Schools Project examined whether a light-touch program comprised of three 90-120 minutes seminars, relevant to the school context and offered to parents free of charge through their child's school, could improve the mental health outcomes of children aged 4-12 years, in Victoria, Queensland and South Australia.
- Universal parenting programs at schools create an opportunity to destigmatise help-seeking and to foster partnerships between teachers, parents, and other professionals
- To increase access e.g., to rural and remote schools and to working parents, the seminars were delivered live and online by experienced Triple P providers.
- School staff were provided with a webinar and accompanying tip sheets. This meant that parents and school staff had a shared toolkit of strategies and a shared language for supporting children.

# Summary of findings

1

Children's emotional 'problems' (e.g., anxiety and depression), their behavioral problems and peer-relationship difficulties all decreased significantly in families when at least one parent attended a Thriving Kids and Parents seminar.

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2

Parents' skills and confidence improved following participation in a Thriving Kids and Parents Seminar, resulting in increases in parents' consistency and encouragement and improvements in the relationship between parents and their children and in their own mental health.

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3

Parents reported being more knowledgeable, using more positive strategies and engaging is less yelling and arguing.

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4

Schools across Victoria, Queensland and South Australia adopted the program enthusiastically.

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5

There was a high level of interest in the Thriving Kids and Parents Schools Project with 380 schools registering to participate.

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6

Participation of families was through their child's school and as a consequence, parents reported better communication with their child's teacher and more involvement in their child's education.



# What we knew before the Thriving Kids and Parents Schools Project

In the aftermath of COVID-19 and other global threats to mental health, children were experiencing increased levels of mental health challenges, behaviour problems and difficulty returning to school.

These problems can:

- Restrict children's access to education
- Impact educational outcomes
- Increase parenting stress
- Contribute to the diagnosis of psychological disorders

For parents, the severity of their child's mental health and behavioural problems can impact their parenting, their own mental health and the relationship with their child's school. These problems lead to higher rates of:

- Parental mental health problems
- Coercive parenting practices
- The likelihood of child maltreatment
- Difficulties expressing parental warmth
- Inconsistent discipline
- Challenges attending their workplace
- Adversarial relationships with school staff

Only a small percentage of families with children with mental health and behaviour problems access expert help.



# What is the best way to support families?

We knew that in order to help as many children as possible we would need to offer a program that was:

- Time efficient
- Cost-effective to deliver for children coping with a broad range of problems
- Easy to access for working parents
- Normalised and encouraged parents to participate
- Involved schools and school staff
- Most importantly, it would need to have been shown to work.

We chose a seminar series offered through schools for this project because it was the program that best met these criteria.

We wanted to know if this intervention could successfully improve parents' capacity to support their children's social, emotional and behavioural development and provide solutions to existing concerns such as anxiety, behaviour problems and challenges with peer relationships and school attendance.

We needed to know whether families would engage and participate in online seminars when offered through their child's school.

Then we needed to know if the Thriving Kids and Parents Seminar Series would result in improvements in child social, emotional and behavior problems, parenting practices and the home-school partnership.



Families dealing with children's social, emotional and behavioural problems in rural and remote location and in low SES schools were the most at risk group of people we wanted to help.

# The Thriving Kids and Parents Seminar Series

The Thriving Kids Seminar Series provides brief parenting advice that is designed to be offered to all parents. Each seminar takes between 90 to 120 minutes to complete, including Q&A time. Experienced Triple P practitioners delivered seminars via videoconferencing (via videoconferencing software). The three seminars are that were part of the series were:



## The Power of Positive Parenting

This seminar can help parents understand why kids behave the way they do what they can do to encourage their child's development and help them to calm down.



## Helping your Child to Manage Anxiety

This seminar is designed to equip parents with skills and strategies to manage their emotions and to overcome challenges.



## Keeping your Child Safe from Bullying

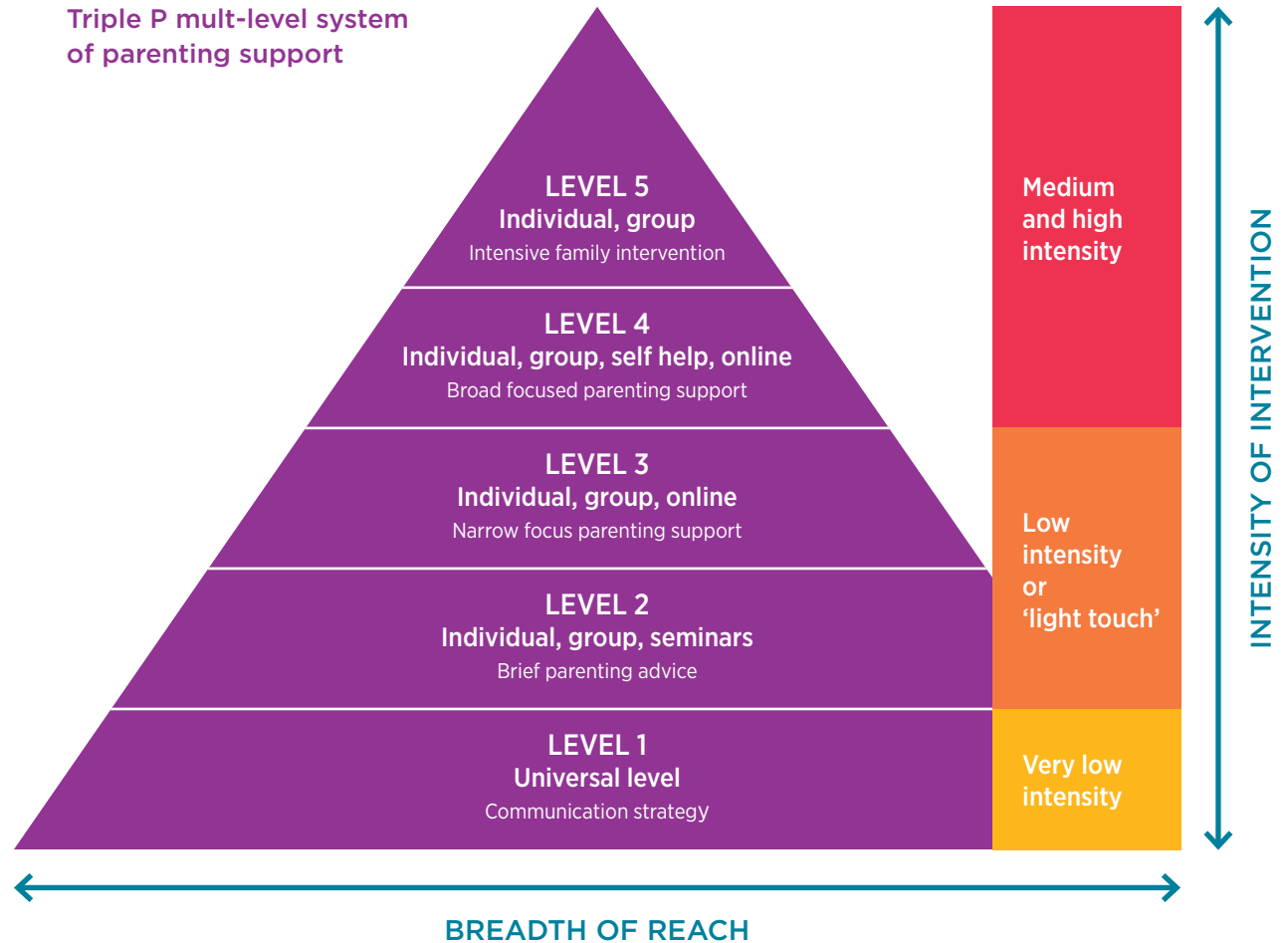
This seminar helps parents to understand what they can do to improve their children's peer relationships and to reduce the risk of them being bullied by their peers.

# Reaching as many families as possible

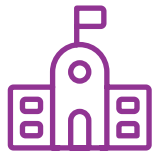
A light-touch (Level 2) seminar series delivered through schools created an opportunity to reach as many parents as possible, to destigmatise help-seeking and to foster partnerships between teachers, parents, and other professionals.

Good parenting is the 'clean water' of children's mental health, resilience and wellbeing International Congress on Evidence-based Parenting Support 2023.

Triple P mult-level system of parenting support



# Program participation and delivery



380 | 165 VIC 148 QLD 67 SA

Schools registered for TKSPS



4,500

Parents & carers registered for TKSPS



82

Number of seminars delivered May–Nov 2023



## Seminar attendance

82%

Power of Positive Parenting

60%

Keeping Your Child Safe from Bullying

71%

Helping Children Manage Anxiety

30%

Attended all 3 seminars



## Delivery

- Online live delivery reduced practical problems that impact parents' participation such as distance, child-care, lack of time.
- School staff were provided access to the Teacher webinar and associated tip sheet.
- All those trained to deliver the seminars were staff from participating schools.

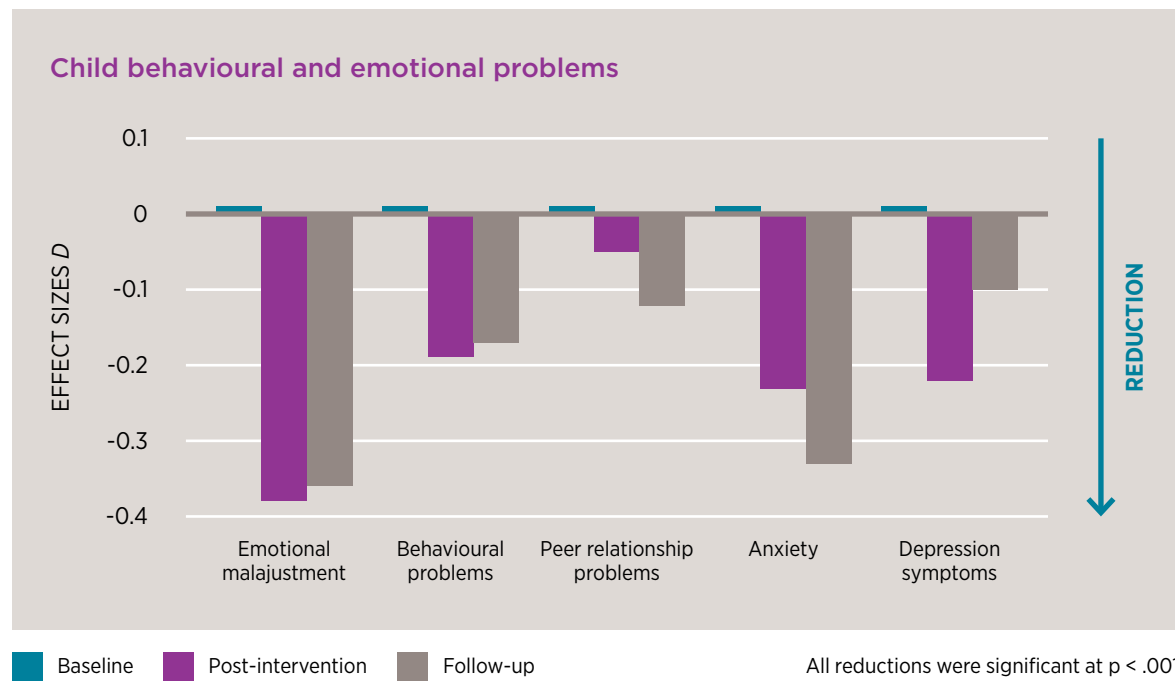


# Was the program effective?

We checked in with families after they attended the seminars and then again 3 months later. We learned that, as a result of seminar attendance, life was better in many ways.

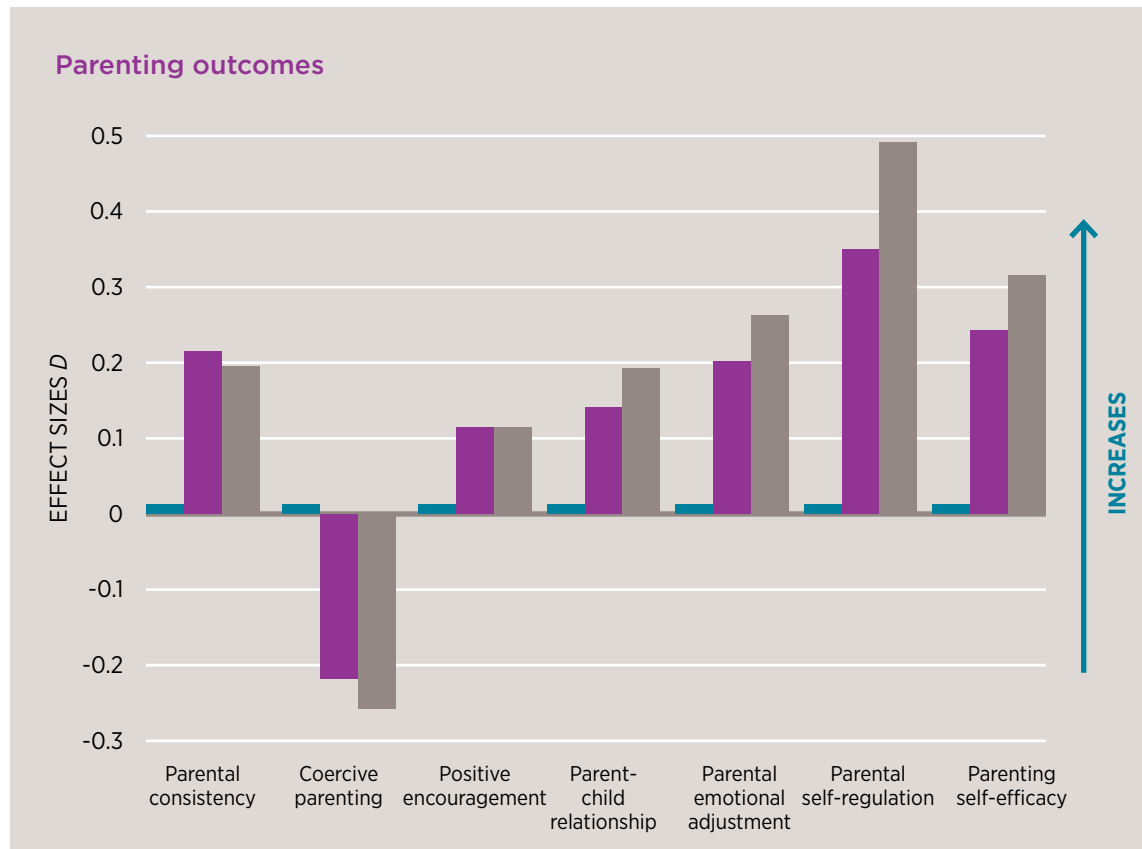
## Outcomes for children

On all measures of negative child behaviour, a significant decrease was shown 3 months after parents attended seminar.



## Outcomes for parents

- On all measures of parenting, a significant improvement was shown 3 months after parents attended seminar.
- Parents' confidence, self-regulation and their wellbeing all continued to improve 3 months after they attended a seminar.
- Parents' relationship with their children and their use of positive encouragement improved and they reported yelling and arguing less.



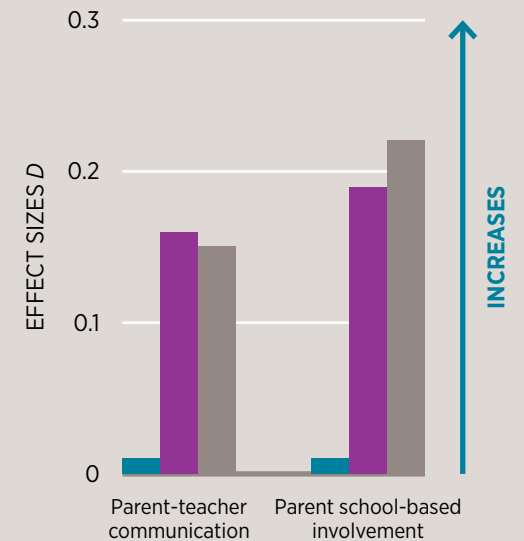
■ Baseline ■ Post-intervention ■ Follow-up

All increases were significant at  $p < .001$

## Was the program effective in improving the home-school partnership?

- Parents reported a significant improvement in communications with their child's teacher and increased involvement at their child's school 3 months after they attended a seminar.

### Home-school partnership outcomes



■ Baseline ■ Post-intervention ■ Follow-up

All increases were significant at  $p < .001$



### How did parents rate the seminars?

Overall, parents were very happy with the Thriving Kids and parents Seminars. They told us that the explanations and examples were clear and, even though the seminars were delivered online, they had opportunities to ask questions. The most exciting response was their commitment to use the information and the strategies they learned in the seminars.

Questions	Ratings (1-7)
Quality of the seminars	5.83
Content of the seminars	5.83
Opportunities for questions	6.25
Seminars were Interesting	5.94
Presenters used clear examples	6.09
Presenter provided clear explanations	6.13
Gain sufficient knowledge to implement the parenting advice	5.76
Seminars were helpful in learning strategies to help child learn	5.76
Usefulness of the parenting tip sheet	5.66
Intention to implement the parenting advice	6.02
Overall rating	5.93

# Program feedback

## What parents said about the Thriving Kids and Parents Seminar Series

“

My child is anxious and I have already had great success implementing the tips you shared.

Presenters were warm, very human and gave great personal examples - made change feel possible.

Thank you for offering these free parenting seminars. They were very well presented and very practical and clear to follow. They are just what the parents need. We need more of them! Well done, great team!

Great course, my husband and I have learned a lot and started implementing some of the techniques to help our kids deal with their emotions.

”



## What were the benefits to participating schools?

“

We do see an increase in anxiety in young people recently. So having those really concrete skills and strategies to share with parents has been really helpful, and to share it with staff to support individual plans here at school and our learning support teacher to use for individual plans.

I think it's mainly the fact that they are really practical and usable skills and strategies that we can kind of talk to parents about. I like that it's really based on that self-regulatory structure. We are empowering parents to make decisions and think about what's working well, and maybe things they can potentially change.

It's definitely given me confidence in certain skills [because] they're evidence based and they're accessible to families. I'd say that it's increased my confidence to provide recommendations, particularly around behaviour, bullying, and anxiety.

Parents have said the teaching and learning doesn't end in the classroom. It's comforting to know that the people that look after my children at school share the same values and also care for our kids.

”



# What is special and unique about the Project



Interventions were delivered online and offered exclusively through schools.



By offering the seminars through schools the message is that attendance is healthy, normal and desirable.



Topics were of key interest to schools and targeted both internalising and externalising problems (i.e., behaviour problems as well as social and emotional problems).



The seminar series could serve as a cost-effective solution to address the challenges to children's mental health posed by the global threats to mental health.



Benefits to kids and parents meant a reduced burden on schools and decreased teacher stress.



# Recommendations

1

Schools have an important role to play in the wellbeing of their students. The Thriving Kids and Parents Seminar Series provided parents and school staff with the key skills to promote children's social and emotional development and to prevent and manage challenging behaviours.

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2

Serious social, emotional and behavioural problems in schools can be prevented by providing parents and school staff with a shared tool kit of strategies and a shared language to work collaboratively to promote children's learning and their wellbeing.

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3

The Thriving Kids and Parents Seminar Series be considered as an integral part of publicly funded universal efforts to reduce social, emotional and behavioural problems in schools.

# THE THRIVING KIDS & PARENTS SCHOOLS PROJECT

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## Information about the free online Triple P programs

[tripleparenting.net.au/qld-en/free-parenting-courses](http://tripleparenting.net.au/qld-en/free-parenting-courses)

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