

Toronto Hospital for Sick Children Study

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Their children were behaving much better. In fact, a lot better.**

There is more and more interest today in “research-based” programs in the area of mental health. When you are encouraging people to use a particular treatment or training approach, it is no longer enough to be able to simply tell an interesting anecdote about how the program did wonders for the former roommate of your Aunt Emma’s cousin. People today want hard data from controlled studies involving large numbers of people.

People often ask if **1-2-3 Magic** is supported by research of this kind. The answer is Yes. Recently one of Toronto’s biggest hospitals, the *Hospital for Sick Children*, completed a large, controlled study which looked at 220 families in which the parents were trained (using the **1-2-3** video) to use **1-2-3 Magic** with their 3- and 4-year-old children. The well-designed, randomized study was conducted in cooperation with ten social service agencies around the Toronto area.

Before engaging in the training, all parents completed questionnaires in which they described the problems their children presented to them as well as the stresses they felt while raising their kids. Parents were then trained over four sessions, with about 7-8 families represented in each group. In the first session, the moms and dads discussed parenting generally with a group facilitator. They talked about the particular problems they were having and why parenting today is difficult. In the next two sessions the parents were shown the entire **1-2-3 Magic: Effective Discipline for Children 2-12** video. After more group discussion, they then went home to get to work!

After several weeks the parents who had been trained reconvened to discuss how they were doing. And four months later, they were sent the same questionnaires they had filled out before they started the program.

The results? First of all, parents reported that they felt better about themselves while parenting. They were less stressed-out, less depressed and less angry. On a 30-item, standardized Parenting Scale (on which lower scores indicate better handling of discipline), treatment group parents’ scores dropped from 3.30 to 2.75 over the three months. This difference was sizeable as well as statistically significant ($p=.0001$).

Control group parents’ scores, on the other hand, went from 3.27 to 3.20, an insignificant difference. Prior to the **1-2-3 Magic** intervention, the Parenting Scale scores of both treatment and control parents indicated that they were functioning at a problematic or “clinical” level. After attending the parent groups, treatment parents reported functioning at a non-clinical level. They were, in other words, not only happy with the **1-2-3- Magic** program, they were also happier with their home lives.

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A second result reported by the **1-2-3 Magic**-trained grownups was that their children were behaving much better. In fact, a lot better. On a Preschool Behavior Questionnaire (again lower scores are better), the treatment group parents' average rating dropped from 19.2 to 15.2 over the three months. This difference was statistically significant at the .01 level. Children from identical, control families whose parents didn't received any training showed no significant improvement over the same period of time. The positive results for the trained parents occurred even though parents were asked, when they had two children who fell in the age group acceptable for the study (3-4), to report results only for the most challenging child. Thus, behavior improved in some pretty difficult children.

As you might expect, a Parent Satisfaction Questionnaire revealed a high level of satisfaction with the program. The vast majority of the parents reported that the program helped them deal more effectively with their children. These grownups also felt the program was easy to learn and apply, and that they would recommend it to a friend. Better behaved children and youngster's who are learning self-discipline has always been a major goal of **1-2-3 Magic**. Parents have a right to expect that their kids will listen, but these adults also need to know exactly how to accomplish that objective without arguing, screaming or spanking. Thanks to the *Hospital for Sick Children* in the Toronto metropolitan area, there are a lot more children these days who are paying attention to what mom and dad say.

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