

OnTrac - A Combined Parent-Child Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CPC-CBT) Program for Children aged 7-10 with ADHD

ADHD is a neurodevelopmental disorder that negatively impacts a child's functioning. When a child or other family member has ADHD, it can shift routines and relationships in ways that affect the whole family, not just the individual with ADHD. Helping a person who has ADHD can be a lot to manage, which can be stressful.

Studies show that when one person in the family has ADHD, it can affect how satisfied parents, siblings, and others in the family feel with their own everyday life (Harpin, 2005). For example, children with ADHD create above average demands on parents' time and attention. In some families this can lead to relationship problems, less family togetherness, conflict, and even depression or divorce.

Unfortunately, some parents feel helpless or lack the skills to effectively parent a child with ADHD. Some parents resort to escalating punitive discipline as a strategy to control their children's problem behaviours. To improve ADHD family relationships and functioning, all families should have access to services that empower parents to effectively parent, strengthen relationships, enhance safety and help children do better in school and society.

Combined Parent-Child therapy is an approach that seeks to engage both parent and child in the same treatment course to create positive outcomes for both parties. Parents and children work collaboratively with the guidance and support of a psychologist. OnTrac CPC program aims to:

- increase the child's understanding of their own condition, their mental wellbeing, and their capacity to implement practical coping skills in their daily lives.
- empower parents, enhance positive parenting skills and reduce parental use of punishment.
- show that a combined and comprehensive approach that meets the needs of both parent and child yields the best outcomes (Runyon & Deblinger, 2010).

Preventative but also corrective in nature this program benefits a continuum of parents ranging from those who fear they are losing control of their children, to those who engage in coercive parenting strategies. This approach has shown to:

- reduce the child's ADHD and comorbid symptoms over a medium to long term by:
 - increasing their understanding of their own unique condition.

- teaching adaptive ways of thinking by providing skills and strategies to deal with disruptive ADHD-related thoughts and behaviours.
- providing practical coping skills, they can implement on their own or with the help of others to manage their daily life struggles at home, school and social domains.
- enhance positive parenting skills and reduce the use of punishment.
- be effective with children and parents from diverse backgrounds.
- be delivered effectively in individual and group therapy formats.
- promote healthy communication within parent-child relationships.

The term 'parent' is defined as any adult caregiver who is in a primary caretaking role of the child. Foster parents, grandparents, biological parents, other relatives, or caregivers can be involved in the program.

Benefits of Including Parents in Treatment

Including parents in a child's treatment yields several benefits. In particular, it addresses factors present in the home environment that may be impacting functioning, and also serves as a space to heal the rifts that have opened up between children and their parents (Dowell & Ogles, 2010). Having both parents and children involved in making change increases the likelihood of lasting change. Additionally, this program is aimed at younger children who may require parental scaffolding to implement what is learnt within the sessions – this is especially relevant considering the executive functioning delay present in ADHD as well as high rates of comorbid learning disorders.

Program Overview

The main focus of the program is to help the parents and young children with ADHD create positive family environments and develop healthy relationships. The program consists of six 2-hour sessions, delivered over the course of 6 weeks. The whole session is spent in the group setting. Participants are provided with an accompanying workbook with relevant information, activities, scenarios and ideas to implement at home/school.

Within the workbook, there are parent-child, child and parent interventions.

- Parent-child interventions are activities for the parent and their child to work through together collaboratively
- Child interventions are activities that are navigable and implementable by child alone
- Parent interventions. Finally, parents are provided with strategies to implement and practice between sessions to promote positive interactions and relationships.

The program comprises three core modules:

1. Psychoeducation/Understanding your ADHD

This module provides participants with mental scaffolding to understand the source of their recurring difficulties. This includes age-appropriate psychoeducation for children to understand ADHD, how it applies to them and the impact it has on their home, school and social lives.

Parents are provided with ways to better understand child development, the ADHD maturity delay and how it affects age-appropriate expectations of behaviour. Comorbidities and medication are also briefly addressed.

2. Adaptive Thinking

This module helps children and parents alike understand how thoughts, feelings, and behaviour can exacerbate ADHD symptoms.

Children work with parents to learn concepts such as ways to cope with negative thinking styles, how to identify their values, appropriate social interaction and mindfulness. Parents are taught assertive conflict resolution skills as well as collaborative problem-solving skills to address ADHD challenges.

3. Practical Coping Skills

This module sees parents working collaboratively with their children to help them manage their time, identify reasons for their procrastination and implement necessary changes. A wealth of strategies is provided to the children to implement into their lives with the guidance and support of their parents.

Many of these strategies can be filtered into a school setting. Involving parents in the CPC program allows them to be the link to their child's teacher.

Communication skills are also addressed.

Program Delivery

OnTrac is delivered by a registered psychologist who offers Medicare rebatable services.

An underlying principle of this program is that the families are the experts on their culture and children, and it is important for facilitators to invite families to educate them in these areas, so the participants and facilitators can work as a collaborative team. Another underlying principle is to identify values and beliefs in families as strengths and to help families utilise these strengths to feel empowered and to produce change in their parenting relationship with their children. We help families support the values and beliefs that are important to them in relation to their children.

Program Materials and Activities

Parents and children work directly in the program workbook completing the many activities and reflective questions. A variety of therapeutic activities, games, and other materials to reinforce skills being taught and increase engagement are found

in the workbook. Laminated tools are provided for the children's 'toolbox'. These are prompts that can help with naming feelings, emotion regulation, exercise and making change. Various questionnaires are administered to parents and children before, during, and after the program to inform the psychologist about their unique needs.

Program Eligibility

Parents with children (aged 7-10) with ADHD as their primary disorder are eligible to enrol in the program.

The program is delivered under group therapy item number 80120. You may be eligible for a rebate if you provide ADHD WA with a referral or a MHCP for your child.

Contact hello@adhdwa.org for any questions.

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