

Tots Talking: feasibility and effectiveness of a community language intervention for pre-school children.

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Abstract

Background: Very young children from lower socioeconomic status (SES) backgrounds often show poorer language development. Whilst there have been attempts to provide early intervention programmes, these sometimes miss the most disadvantaged groups. Speech and language skills development in young children is supported by interactive, to-and-fro exchanges with responsive adults using contingent language strategies including turn taking, pausing, extending a child's utterance and following their lead and interest. In some families this habit of contingent language use is not established and adults who have not been exposed to these behaviours as children may not have them in their parenting skills-set.

Changing behaviour as an adult is hard, in this project we looked at ways to change the communication behaviour of adult carers, our hypothesis being that this would then impact on the language development of their children. We used a co-design approach with families in disadvantaged communities to develop an intervention following the COM-B model, co-design allowed families to identify and address barriers to access and increase feasibility and acceptability of the intervention.

Aims: We present preliminary feasibility and effectiveness data for

Tots Talking a novel language intervention designed for parents of toddlers in the United Kingdom.

Methods and Procedures: In total, 43 UK families of 2-4-year-olds were recruited to the study, half of whom completed an 8-week course (Tots Talking) focussed on parent interaction, and half of whom acted as wait-list controls.

Results and Outcomes: Results suggest that such programmes are feasible for families with 86% staying in the intervention. In addition, greater changes in underlying communication skills such as joint attention and gesture were evident compared to wait-list controls.

Conclusions and Implications: We conclude that pre-verbal skills may be more important to measure as initial outcomes than language or vocabulary change in this population. Our initial study indicates that Tots Talking is a promising intervention which contributes to the tools available for early intervention to support the communication and language of young children.