

Making health promotion programmes inclusive for parents of disabled children from diverse backgrounds

Plain English Summary

Definition: A parent carer is an adult primary caregiver for a disabled child.

Key Findings

- Programme providers need to understand which groups of parent carers are less likely to hear about the programme and why, to inform the best way to reach them.
- Parent carers will judge the credibility of the messenger and who is delivering the programme before deciding to take part.
- Credibility is developed over time through authentic community-based work that understands and supports parent carers.
- When advertising, seeing and hearing from ‘people like me’ or ‘word of mouth’ recommendations about the programme benefits helps the message resonate.
- Social, cultural and practical reasons can explain why some parent carers do not believe that a programme is relevant for them. Providers should seek to understand these reasons when encouraging parent carers to participate.
- Programmes may need to be adapted to be inclusive for parent carers depending on their needs.

Why did we do this study?

There is lots of evidence that parent carers are at greater risk of poor mental and physical health. Parent carers naturally prioritise the needs of their children, but sometimes neglect their own health. Health promotion programmes, like [Healthy Parent Carers](#), have been created to address parent carer's health and wellbeing needs. It is vital that these programmes are inclusive for parents from diverse backgrounds. However, there may be hidden obstacles for some groups of parent carers. These groups might be unintentionally excluded or easy to overlook for different reasons. We wanted to find out how to make such programmes as inclusive as possible.

How did we do it?

Our parent advisory group guided us on which groups of parent carers might be more likely to be excluded, and so should be included in the study. We chose to include parent carers from ethnic minority groups, fathers, parents with sensory impairments and those whose children were educated other than at school. We found participants through local and national networks and organisations. Thirty-six parent carers from different backgrounds took part in the study.

We did individual online interviews. We did analysis as a team to find common themes. The parent advisory group gave feedback on whether our findings made sense and how best to put them into action.

What have we learned?



Reach describes the importance of ensuring everyone has an equal chance to hear about the programme. For example, some parent carers are not on group email lists, social media or online forums, and others are less aware of how to get information. Advertising needs to understand which groups of parents are being missed and how best to reach them.



Credibility of those promoting and delivering the programme is important so that those thinking about taking part do not dismiss it. Teams promoting and delivering the programme build trustworthiness through creating a track record of community engagement and by showing an understanding of different community cultures, values and needs. When advertising, seeing and hearing from ‘people like me’ or ‘word of mouth’ recommendations about the programme benefits helps the message to resonate.



A parent carer health programme provides an **opportunity**. Not all parent carers have a need for that opportunity. However, some parent carers may not be aware that they have a need that the programme could help address. Social and cultural factors might mean that some parents struggle to accept their identity as a parent carer. It is important to acknowledge the challenges of being a parent carer and promote the unique benefits of the programme to ensure that it is seen as relevant. A clear and appealing message needs to be created for the target audience. The message needs to use inclusive language, be accessible (e.g. use alt text with images, and translate into community languages if necessary) and culturally appropriate (e.g. use pictures of parent carers from different ethnic communities).



Parent carers can be unsure about taking part in health promotion programmes for social, emotional and practical reasons. These reasons might affect some parent carers more than others. Providers need to try to break down these barriers and **address reservations** for joining programmes in different ways. For example, creating comfortable social spaces for parent carers to first meet each other in their community where the programme can be discussed.



Optimisation of the programme involves making changes, so that it is easier for different groups to take part, and everyone can benefit. It is important to nurture a sense of feeling together around the shared experience of being a parent carer. This ‘togetherness’ can help attendees feel comfortable when taking part, regardless of other differences.

Summary

Different challenges to equal access on health promotion programmes for parent carers have been explored. We have developed recommendations to address these challenges.

Additional Information

The full version of this research paper is published in the journal *Frontiers in Public Health*. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpubh.2024.1445879>

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