

An Evaluation of National Data from the Family Links Talking Teens Programme

Report Summary:

The data analysed in this research report was collated from 42 parents who participated in the Family Links Talking Teens Programme. Talking Teens is a 4-week parenting programme, based on the Family Links Nurturing Programme, specifically for parents of teenagers, or soon-to-be teenagers. This evaluation collected data from twelve Talking Teens courses that ran between 2017 and 2018.

The impact of Talking Teens groups was assessed using three questionnaires in a pre/post design: How things are in your Family assessing various aspects of family life, including parenting strategies, family relationships and the family environment, the Brief Parental Self-Efficacy Scale (BPSES) and the Tool to Measure Parenting Self-Efficacy (TOPSE), both of which measure parenting self-efficacy. Alongside evaluating the impact of the programme, parents were asked to give qualitative feedback about their experiences of the programme via questionnaires and a focus group with parents at the end of their Talking Teens course.

Results showed that there was a **statistically significant improvement in all measures** following the Talking Teens programme, showing **significant improvements in parenting self-efficacy and aspects of family life**. Feedback from parents via questionnaires and the focus group showed that parents felt that they had benefitted from the programme. They reported improvements across a range of outcomes, including improved understanding of their teenager, increased repertoire of parenting strategies and reassurance that other parents were having similar experiences. Further research will help better understanding of how the programme works, and could examine longitudinal outcomes for the programme.

Family Links is committed to conducting and commissioning rigorous and innovative evaluations of our work with children and families. If you would like to find out more, please visit us at www.familylinks.org.uk or get in touch at research@familylinks.org.uk.

Family Links is very grateful to the participants who took part in this study and to the practitioners for sharing data, which enables increased understanding of how the Talking Teens Programme impacts on vital aspects of parenting.

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Adolescence can be a challenging time for both teenagers and for parents of teenagers. Alongside the numerous physical and neurological changes that occur during adolescence, teenagers are also developing their own identity and becoming more independent. Parents can find it difficult to understand their role, as teenagers may be less reliant on their parents to meet their needs, and be more influenced by their peer group. Many parents of teenagers report difficulties communicating with their teenager, along with increased conflict, particularly around setting boundaries.

The Family Links Talking Teens Programme is a 4-week parenting programme which aims to equip parents with the knowledge and skills to understand and communicate with their teenager, reducing conflict and improving the quality of family relationships. There are four key strategies covered in the programme:

- Increasing awareness of parenting styles, particularly around authoritative parenting
- Understanding teenage development, including the adolescent brain
- Strategies for effective communication, including listening and empathy
- Managing and reducing conflict, including boundary setting and problem-solving

The programme contains taught content, group work and experiential tasks, and the group setting facilitates parents to reflect on their experiences and share ideas, as well as creating opportunities for social support.

Evaluation Method:

Design: The evaluation adopted a pre/post design, with parents completing an evaluation booklet at the start of the Talking Teens group and after the final session. This allows us to assess the changes in parenting outcomes between the start and the end of the programme.

Sample: Evaluation data was collected from 12 groups running across 9 different services, including Children/Family Centres and schools. Parents were able to opt out of completing the evaluation if they did not wish to participate. Across the twelve groups, pre and post datasets were obtained from 44 parents. This is approximately 57% of the total number of parents who started a group, although this figure is only based on the seven groups who returned attendance figures.

Measures: Parents completed the following pre/post questionnaires:

How things are in your family: 'How things are in your family' is a questionnaire developed by Family Links which aims to assess various aspects of family life, including parenting strategies, family relationships and the family environment. It consists of eight statements which are based around the specific outcomes articulated in the Talking Teens Theory of Change (Appendix 1). Parents rate how much they agree with each statement by selecting a response on an 11-point Likert scale, from 0 (completely disagree) to 10 (completely agree). Two statements are negatively framed (e.g. I find it difficult to communicate effectively with my teenager) and are accordingly reverse-scored. The maximum score is 80, with higher scores indicating greater knowledge of parenting strategies, more positive family relationships and a happier family environment. An increase in score between pre and post group measures indicates that parents are reporting an improvement in these areas.

Brief Parental Self-Efficacy Scale: Self-efficacy, derived from Bandura's social learning theory, is the belief in one's ability, and is considered to be an important determinant of behaviour change (Bandura, 1977). Improved parental self-efficacy is one of the expected outcomes articulated in the Talking Teens

Theory of Change (Appendix 1), which is based around the idea that parents act as the mediators of change for improving both child and family outcomes. The Brief Parental Self-Efficacy Scale is a measure of parenting self-efficacy, assessing parents' beliefs about how effectively they can perform various aspects of parenting. It has 5 items and parents indicate how much they agree with each statement by selecting a response on a 5-point Likert scale from Strongly Disagree to Strongly Agree. The maximum score is 25, with higher scores indicating greater parenting self-efficacy. An increase in score between pre and post group measures indicates an improvement in parenting self-efficacy.

Parents also completed one of the following versions of TOPSE, as an additional aim of the evaluation was to pilot a version of TOPSE adapted for parents of teenagers.

Standard TOPSE: This is a validated questionnaire specifically developed to analyse the effectiveness of parenting programmes on improving parenting confidence (Kendall & Bloomfield, 2005). TOPSE consists of 48 statements across eight areas of parenting:

- Emotion and affection
- Play and enjoyment
- Empathy and understanding
- Control
- Discipline and boundary setting
- Coping with pressures of parenting
- Self-acceptance
- Learning and knowledge

There are six statements for each of the eight areas and parents indicate how much they agree with each statement by selecting a response on an 11-point Likert scale, from 0 (completely disagree) to 10 (completely agree). The maximum score for each area is 60, and the maximum total score (calculated by adding together the 8 area scores) is 480. Higher scores indicate greater parenting confidence and an increase in the TOPSE score between pre and post group measures indicates that the parent's self-efficacy has improved.

Teen TOPSE: Teen TOPSE is an adapted version of TOPSE developed specifically for parents of teenagers. It consists of 49 statements across the same eight areas in the standard TOPSE (outlined above). Each area has six statements, with the exception of the 'Emotions and Affection' subscale which contains seven statements. The majority of the statements in Teen TOPSE are identical to the original TOPSE. However, some statements have been rewritten so they are more applicable to parents of teenagers. For example, the original TOPSE statement "Playing with my child comes easily to me" was changed to "Having fun with my child comes easily to me" in the Teen version. Teen TOPSE is scored in the same way as standard TOPSE. With the addition of an extra statement in the 'Emotions and Affection' subscale, the maximum Teen TOPSE score is 490, with 60 as the maximum for each subscale, except for the "Emotions and Affection" subscale, which has a maximum of 70.

Data Analysis:

Shapiro-Wilk tests showed that data was normally distributed for all questionnaires (Table 1), and therefore parametric paired t-tests were conducted for all measures to assess the difference between pre and post scores.

A 95% confidence interval was used to determine statistical significance, and effect sizes are reported using Cohen's *d*, which quantifies the magnitude of change in scores. An effect size of $d=0.20$ denotes a small effect size, $d=0.5$ a medium effect size and $d=0.8$ being large effect size, where values can exceed 1.

	Number of complete datasets	Shapiro-Wilk Test	Normal distribution?	Statistical Test conducted
How things are in Your Family	42	p=0.21	Yes	Paired t-test
Brief Parental Self-Efficacy Scale	40	p=0.052	Yes	Paired t-test
Standard TOPSE	14	p=0.53	Yes	Paired t-test
Teen TOPSE	27	p=0.08	Yes	Paired t-test

Table 1: Shapiro-Wilk Test Results for each measure

Evaluation Results:

How things are in your family: There was a statistically significant increase in scores between pre and post questionnaires, ($t=12.07$, $p<0.01$, $n=42$), showing that parents were reporting a significant improvement in their parenting strategies, relationship with their teenager(s) and the family environment after participating in the Talking Teens programme. The average difference in parents' scores was 14.8, which corresponds to a 34% increase in score. The effect size (showing the magnitude of these changes) was $d=1.5$, which is interpreted as a large effect ($d=.20$ small, $d=.50$ medium, $d=.80$ large). In total, 100% of parents showed an increase in their score after attending a Talking Teens group, indicating that all parents were reporting improvements to aspects of family life.

STATEMENT AREA	Average Pre Score	Average Post Score	Average Change	% Change
Awareness of Parenting Styles	6.4	8.3	1.9	29%
Ability to stay calm	5.6	7.7	2.1	38%
Knowledge of Teenage Development	5.5	8.2	2.6	48%
Communicating with Teenager	4.8	5.7	0.9	19%
Managing Conflict & Disagreement	4.9	7.6	2.7	56%
Positive Relationship with Teenager	6.5	8.1	1.6	24%
Level of Conflict & Disagreement within Family	4.6	5.6	1.0	21%
Happy Family Environment	5.8	7.2	1.5	25%
TOTAL	44.1	58.4	14.8	34%

Table 2: 'How things are in your family' Results

All eight areas assessed in the 'How things are in your family' questionnaire showed an increase the average score between pre and post questionnaires, showing improvements against all aims of the programme. The largest increase was for Managing Conflict and Disagreement, which increased by 56% (Table 2, Figure 1).

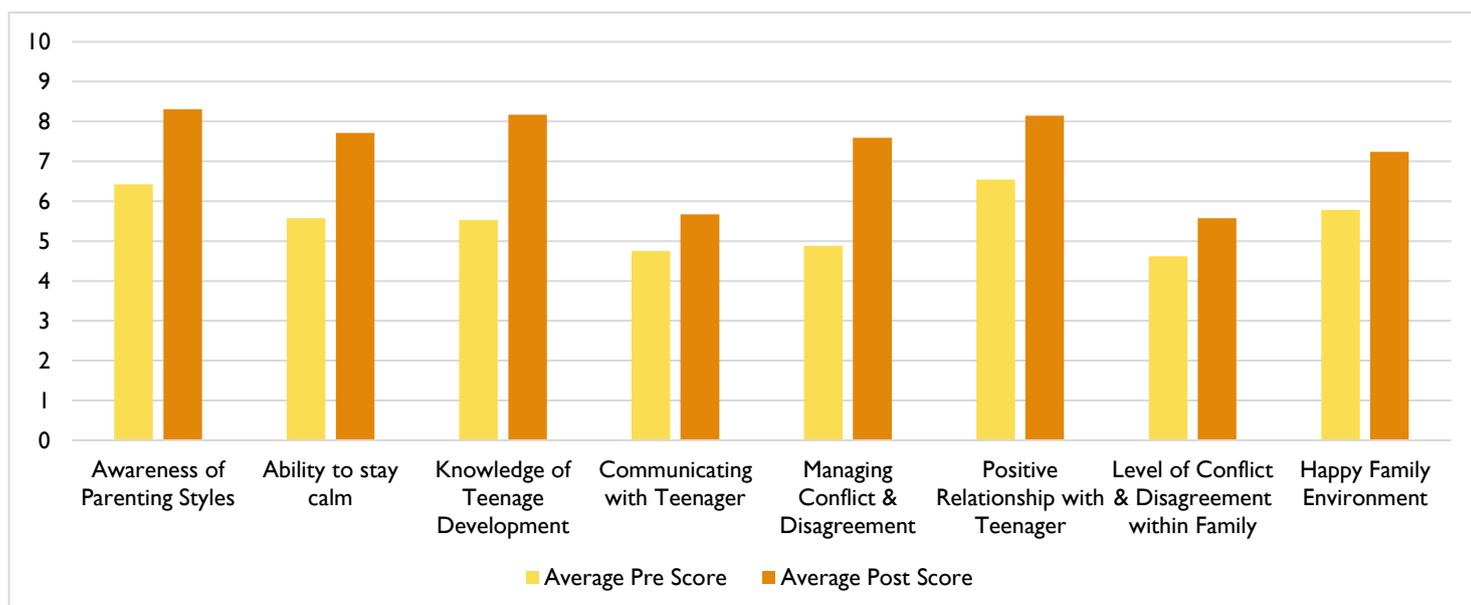


Figure 1: 'How things are in your family' Results

BPSES: There was a statistically significant increase in BPSES scores ($t=5.78$, $p<0.01$, $n=40$), showing that parents were reporting significantly higher levels of self-efficacy after completing the Talking Teens programme. The average increase between pre and post score was 3.7, which corresponds to a 21% increase. All five statements showed an increase in average score following the group (Table 3 and Figure 2). The effect size for the increase in total score was $d=0.99$ which is a large effect.

STATEMENT AREA	Average Pre Score	Average Post Score	Average Change	% Change
Even though I may not always manage it, I know what my child needs	3.4	4.3	0.9	26%
I am able to do things that will improve my child's behaviour	3.2	4.1	0.9	30%
I can make an important difference to my child	4	4.5	0.5	11%
In most situations, I know what I should do to ensure my child behaves	3.2	4.0	0.8	26%
The things I do make a difference to my child	3.7	4.3	0.6	16%
TOTAL	17.5	21.2	3.7	21%

Table 3: Brief Parental Self-Efficacy Scale Results

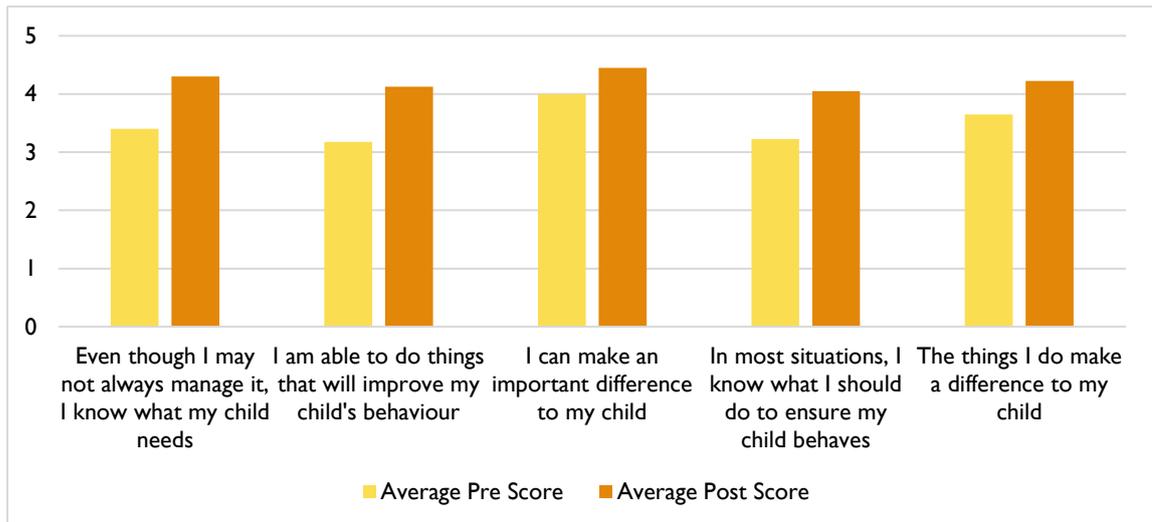


Figure 2: Brief Parental Self-Efficacy Scale Results

Standard TOPSE: For the standard version of TOPSE, there was a statistically significant increase in scores after the programme ($t=3.09$, $p<0.01$, $n=14$), showing that parents were reporting significantly higher levels of self-efficacy. The average increase between pre and post score was 3.7, which corresponds to a 12% increase. All eight areas showed an increase in average score following the group (Table 4 and Figure 3), although increases in the pressures, self-acceptance and learning and knowledge subscales were all under 5% and did not show statistically significant improvements.

STATEMENT AREA	Average Pre Score	Average Post Score	Average Change	% Change
Emotion and Affection	45.6	50.2	4.6	10%
Play and Enjoyment	40.7	48.1	7.4	18%
Empathy and Understanding	43.1	49.2	6.1	14%
Control	33.4	42.9	9.5	28%
Discipline and Boundaries	36.7	44.8	8.1	22%
Pressures	36.9	37.5	0.6	2%
Self-acceptance	44.4	45.9	1.5	3%
Learning and Knowledge	45.9	47.6	1.6	4%
TOTAL	326.7	366.1	39.4	12%

Table 4: Standard TOPSE Results

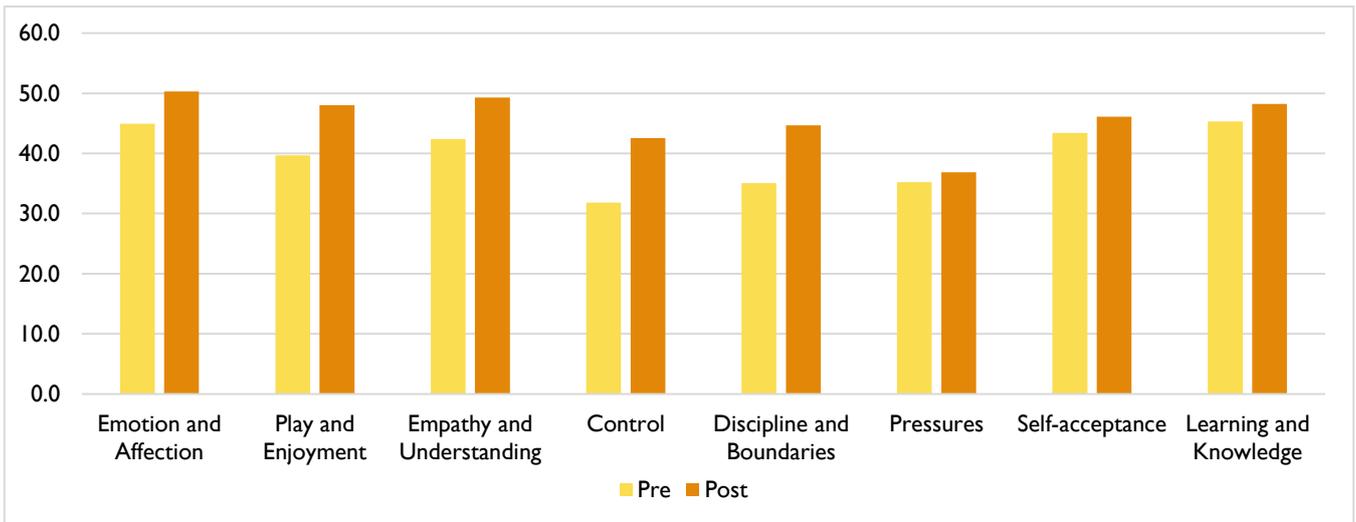


Figure 3: Standard TOPSE Results

Teen TOPSE: There was also significant increase in scores after the programme for parents who completed the Teen TOPSE ($t=6.79$, $p<0.01$, $n=27$) showing that parents were reporting significantly higher levels of parenting self-efficacy. Similar to the standard TOPSE, there was an increase in score across all eight subscales, with the largest increases in the Control and Discipline and Boundaries subscales (Table 5 and Figure 4).

STATEMENT AREA	Average Pre Score	Average Post Score	Average Change	% Change
Emotion and Affection	48.6	57.0	8.4	17%
Play and Enjoyment	36.2	46.6	10.3	29%
Empathy and Understanding	39.1	47.7	8.6	22%
Control	27.7	38.2	10.5	38%
Discipline and Boundaries	31.3	42.3	10.9	35%
Pressures	40.3	42.9	2.6	7%
Self-acceptance	43.7	48.5	4.8	11%
Learning and Knowledge	45.5	50.7	5.3	12%
TOTAL	312.4	373.9	61.5	20%

Table 5: Teen TOPSE Results

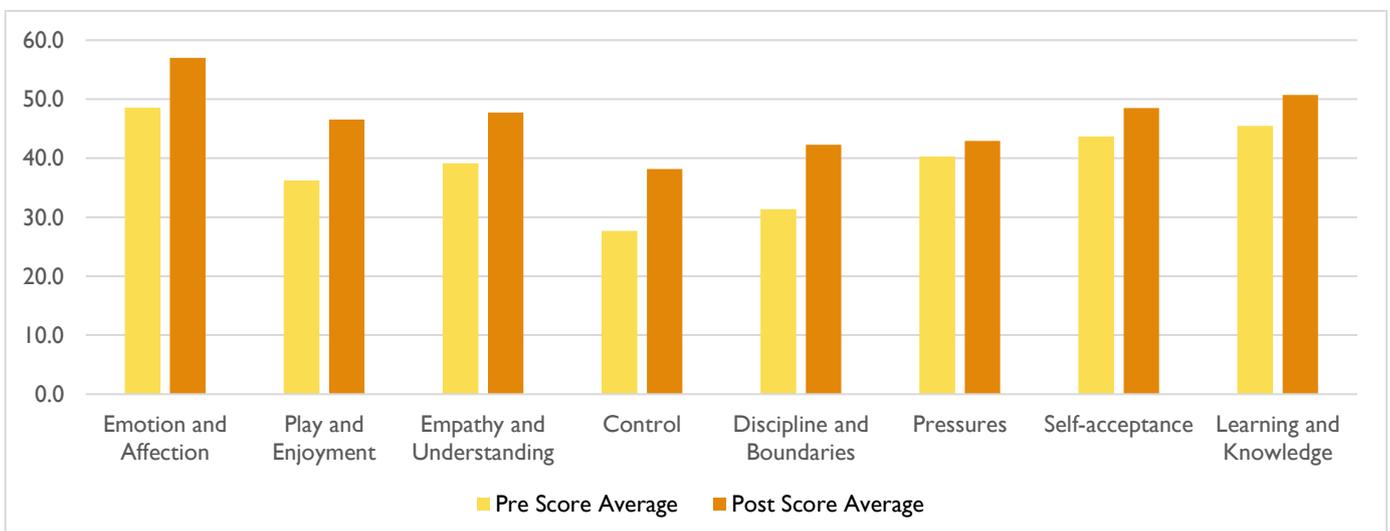


Figure 4: Teen TOPSE Results

Summary of Evaluation Results: All four questionnaires showed a statistically significant increase in score after the programme, showing that parents were reporting improved parenting self-efficacy and more positive family life.

Programme Feedback:

Parent Questionnaires: At the end of the programme, parents were shown the same list and asked to identify the issues which they felt the course had supported them with. Results are shown in Table 6 below. The more frequently cited areas that parents felt the course had helped with were communicating effectively with their teenager (98%), staying calm (98%) and managing conflict and disagreement (95%).

AREA OF SUPPORT	% OF PARENTS WHO FELT THE COURSE SUPPORTED
Communicating effectively with teenager	98%
Staying calm	98%
Managing conflict and disagreement	95%
Understanding teenage development	91%
Improved parenting confidence	86%
Creating a more positive family environment	86%
Improving relationship with teenager	86%
Setting and enforcing boundaries	84%
Supporting teenager's mental/emotional health	70%
Having a consistent parenting approach with partner	63%
Motivating teenager with school/work/future	56%
Support for issues around friendships/peer groups	49%
Support for issues around social media/the digital world	47%
Support for issues around alcohol	37%
Support for issues around drugs	35%
Support for issues around sex	35%

Table 6: Parent Questionnaire: Issues which parents felt the course supported

Parents were asked to rate how helpful they had found the course on a Likert Scale from 0 – 10 (where 10=most helpful). The average rating was 9.0, indicating that parents found the course to be very helpful. Parents were also asked if they would recommend the programme. 100% of parents (n=43) responded that they would recommend the programme to other parents of teenagers.

Parents also had an option of given a comment about their experience of the course. Comments indicated parents had gained a range of benefits from the course, a selection of which is shown below:

- *“I have found my relationship already improving with my child.”*
- *“Gained invaluable knowledge in all areas, very helpful”*
- *“Fantastic, supportive, informative, practical, normalising, enhancing confidence all round.”*
- *“Everybody should attend this course. Even if you only learn one thing, it will improve your relationship/home environment, making a more positive life for your children.”*
- *“Really enjoyed being in a group with other mums and sharing experiences. I grew in confidence and parenting. I would like to continue with my learning and going to other courses.”*
- *“It's been so, so useful. The ultimate benefits will include the way my children parent their children...and so on, so I can see the massive value to society now and in the future. Thank you all.”*

Several parents felt that the strategies had been helpful, but they needed time to fully embed them within their family life: *“I have the knowledge but I need to put them into practice.”* A couple of parents made suggestions for improvements. This included a longer course (*“Very helpful - shame not longer than 4 weeks”*) and specific content around drug and alcohol use: *“If the course was longer, more specific help around drugs and alcohol would be valuable.”* One parent also felt the course was more beneficial to parents of younger teenagers: *“I believe parents with children who are going to be teenagers will benefit. My children are 17 and 19 so a bit late for us.”*

Parent Focus Group: A semi-structured focus group was held with three parents immediately after they completed the programme, to gain a deeper insight into their experiences of the programme and the impacts it had had for them and their families.

All parents felt that they had benefitted from the programme, and a range of outcomes were discussed, including improved understanding of their teenager, increased repertoire of parenting strategies and reassurance that other parents were having similar experiences:

- *“I personally feel that I think about my teenagers behavior and the emotions behind it, and think about the empathy...And if I’m going to criticize her, just thinking about the positives and how I’m going to use the I statements, and show the empathy but still make the point.”* (Parent 3)
- *“And now [my husband] is picking up on the positives, and using I statements, and not being judgmental, and I’ve seen that difference... It is huge, because I haven’t seen shouting and arguments for the last 2 weeks. That’s a massive thing for me. And it makes a difference to everyone. They both seem much happier and can actually talk to each other, which they couldn’t really do before, which is great.”* (Parent 3)
- *“I just feel I’m a lot calmer and clearer, and have a lot more resources to be thoughtful. I feel just generally better tooled up to deal with it more confidently.”* (Parent 1)
- *“Thinking more about my son’s world and thinking of it more from what he’s experiencing rather than putting our spin on it all the time.”* (Parent 2)
- *“One of the biggest impacts for me was hearing other people in the room. Because you don’t quite know where you are, and the behavior you’re experiencing, am I alone or is everyone better or worse, but actually everyone’s got very similar stories.”* (Parent 2)

Conclusions and Discussion:

Results from the pre/post group questionnaires showed a statistically significant increase in all measures, showing that parents were showing a significant increase in parental self-efficacy and reporting more positive family life following the 4-week Talking Teens programme. It is likely that these positive changes in parenting have an effect on teenager’s behavioural and emotional functioning, linked to the programme’s Theory of Change (Appendix 1).

Although there was a significant difference between pre and post scores, because of the lack of a control group, we cannot definitively attribute the changes to the Talking Teens programme without further study involving a counterfactual. Information about the fidelity and dose of programme implementation was also not collected, and these are factors which inevitably impact on the changes in parenting outcomes that are achieved.

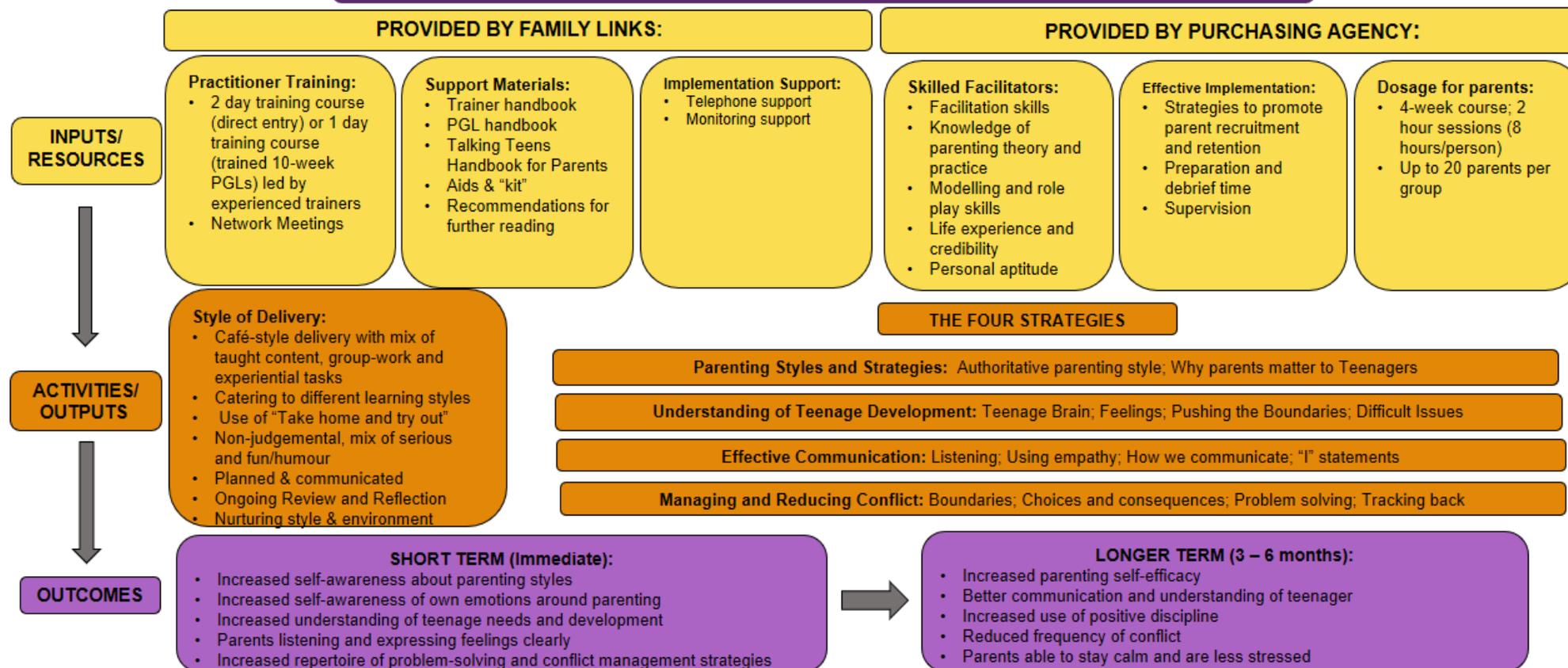
In addition, the small sample size and findings from a practitioner survey showing that groups are being delivered at both a universal and a targeted level means that it is difficult to generalise findings. Further research could therefore use a larger sample and examine the demographic and context variables to determine which types of parents and families the programme is most effective for, and under what circumstances. The study also only examined the impacts of the programme at the end of the 4-week course. Future research could include a longitudinal study to see whether these effects are maintained at a 3-month follow-up.

Appendix I: Theory of Change for the Talking Teens Programme

PROBLEM: Parents lack the knowledge and skills to understand and communicate with their teenagers, leading to high levels of conflict and stress within family relationships.

RATIONALE: Group-based parenting programmes are an effective method of supporting parents to develop their knowledge and skills; They also provide space for parents to reflect on both their current parenting and the way that they themselves were parented, as well as creating opportunities for social support and networking.

ASSUMPTION: Parents will engage with the programme and practise implementing the strategies within family life.



GOAL: To equip parents with the knowledge and skills to understand and communicate with their teenager, reducing conflict and improving the quality of family relationships.