# The Importance of Parenting Programs in Reducing Various Problems Among Families of Individuals with Special Needs

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## Abstract

The current study aimed to explore the nature of parenting programs and their importance in helping families of children with special needs overcome the obstacles and problems they face while caring for and raising children with various disabilities and developmental disorders. These programs consist of scientifically validated methods designed to support and assist parents and other family members, preventing them from struggling alone with the daily challenges they encounter with their children. To achieve the study's objective, theoretical frameworks and literature concerning parenting programs and their significance for families of individuals with special needs were reviewed. Previous studies that investigated the effectiveness of these programs in reducing certain problems faced by such families were also examined and analyzed, with the goal of drawing conclusions that highlight the importance of parenting programs in helping these families overcome the challenges and difficulties they face, prevent problems, and ensure proper handling and resolution of issues.

## Citation

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## Introduction

Families of individuals with special needs often find themselves navigating a complex and emotionally demanding reality, marked by daily challenges that stem from their children's diverse disabilities and developmental disorders. These challenges are not limited to the practical aspects of caregiving but extend to emotional, psychological, social, and even finan-

cial dimensions. Without appropriate support and guidance, parents and family members may experience significant stress, confusion, and a sense of isolation.

In response to these pressing needs, parenting programs have emerged as structured and scientifically grounded interventions aimed at equipping families with the skills, strategies, and emotional support necessary to face their unique circumstances. These programs are designed not only to assist parents in managing the behavioral and developmental aspects of their children's conditions but also to enhance the overall family dynamic, reduce conflict, and foster resilience.

Despite the growing recognition of their benefits, many families remain unaware of the availability or relevance of such programs, or they may lack access to them altogether. This gap between need and provision raises essential questions about how to best support families in their caregiving roles and what impact parenting programs can realistically have on mitigating the difficulties they endure.

This article seeks to shed light on the importance of parenting programs as a preventive and supportive framework for families of individuals with special needs. It explores existing theoretical and empirical work on the subject, aiming to demonstrate how these programs contribute meaningfully to reducing various problems within such families, thereby enhancing their capacity to care effectively and sustainably for their children.

## Problem Statement

The family is commonly defined as a group of people connected by relationships. Some view it as a social relationship, while others see it as a group consisting of parents and children living together in the same household. The family is also a foundational educational institution established through marriage, where members interact through close-knit relationships (Taleb, Abi Suleiman & Taleb, 2019).

From this perspective, parents play a crucial role in raising their children in all areas—including academic education, psychological treatment, and behavioral adjustment. According to Yahya (2000), a study conducted by Frankl and his colleagues investigated the impact of home-based training delivered by parents to their children on behavior modification and the development of social skills. The study's findings indicated that children who received such training were able to correct undesirable behaviors, learn positive social interaction skills, and transfer these learned behaviors to the school environment (Abdel Jalil, 2018, p. 39).

However, parents are often not fully aware of their children's diverse needs, especially in terms of educational requirements, behavior modification, skill development, and how to handle the various problems their children may encounter throughout their developmental stages. Some parents may even have children born with or who develop disabilities. Since individuals with disabilities have special needs, the term "special needs" is adopted in this study to refer to children with various forms of disabilities and developmental disorders.

There is no doubt that having a child with special needs poses significant challenges for the entire family. It represents critical and sensitive turning points in the lives of all family members, directly affecting their psychological, social, economic, and behavioral well-being. Therefore, providing families of children with special needs with services and support that address their unique needs and reduce psychological pressures is primarily a way to meet the needs of the child with special needs.

Families of individuals with special needs go through many hardships, beginning from the moment they learn of their child's condition, through stages of suffering, attempting to adapt and accept, and eventually reaching caregiving and rehabilitation. Malhotra et al. (2012) noted that having a child with developmental disabilities requires significant adjustment among parents and other family members. According to Majd & Sareskanrud (2012), researchers who studied the quality of life of exceptional children and their families concluded that the growth of children within their families and their relationships with family members are crucial for their development and care (Al-San'ani, 2019, p. 103).

Abdel-Baqi Salem (2012) notes that among the most pressing issues and stressors faced by families of children with disabilities are social isolation—stemming from a lack of support from relatives and friends—and the disproportionate burden of caregiving placed on mothers due to the father's financial responsibilities. This leads to exhaustion, disrupts family stability—especially affecting siblings—and fosters fears about the future care of the child, particularly in severe cases. Additional challenges include the difficulty of accessing appropriate services, lack of caregiving skills, and parents feeling ill-equipped to deal with their child. This necessitates the pursuit of knowledge and successful experiences in raising their child (Saafan, Abu Halimah, & Safooh, 2022, p. 362). Moreover, these difficulties negatively impact the child with special needs directly.

Families of children with special needs deserve support that improves their children's condition and enhances their stability and quality of life. Parenting programs offer comprehensive support to such families through educational, training, and counseling interventions directed by specialists. These programs aim to guide parents in raising their children, managing

behaviors and emotions, developing capabilities, and learning the best parenting practices during times of change and family stress.

As advocacy grows for parent-focused programs and support for families of children with special needs to help these children receive the education and care necessary for improvement, there has been an increasing focus on parenting systems as a major influence on child development in all its dimensions. Consequently, the most important goal for specialists in special education, psychology, and family counseling has become parental support through education, training, and guidance. This approach can help alleviate the severity of problems faced by families of children with disabilities.

This is what prompted the two researchers to investigate the effectiveness of parenting programs aimed at families of children with special needs. Accordingly, the study raises the following two questions:

1. What is the importance of parenting programs for families of children with special needs?

2. What supportive factors do parenting programs provide to help families overcome the challenges they face?

## Objectives of the Study:

- To identify the sources of importance of parenting programs for families of individuals with special needs.

- To uncover the supportive factors provided by parenting programs that help families of individuals with special needs overcome the problems (challenges) they face.

## Significance of the Study:

The significance of this study lies in its contribution to the theoretical knowledge available in academic institutions, as it draws upon rich literature encompassing concepts related to parenting programs and their surrounding dimensions. It emphasizes the vital role played by parents and guardians of individuals with special needs and builds on prior research regarding the effectiveness of such programs in improving the quality of life for these families.

Moreover, the study aims to direct attention to the real challenges faced by individuals with special needs—challenges that are borne and managed by their families, including parents and siblings. Highlighting their struggles serves as a call to action for responsible institutions to implement fundamental solutions. These solutions should include the provision of adequate support—such as financial aid, work-from-home opportunities for mothers, and the development of preventive and therapeutic parenting-based approaches that empower caregivers and enhance their role in supporting children and adolescents with disabilities.

## Previous Studies

### 1. Abu Al-Saud Study (2002):

This study aimed to examine the effectiveness of a cognitive-behavioral therapeutic program in developing emotional responses in autistic children and their parents. It targeted the stimulation of the child's emotions and those of the parents in an effort to help the child emerge from social isolation and establish a communication bridge with those around him. The results showed a significant reduction in emotional isolation and negative emotions, as well as improved interactions between the parents and their child (Bin Zabin, 2019, p. 25).

### 2. Cassandra L. Tellegen & Matthew R. Sanders (2013):

This study evaluated the effects of the "Stepping Stones Triple P – Positive Parenting Program" on families of children with disabilities. The program was applied to 659 families across 12 studies. Results indicated a moderate but statistically significant reduction in behavioral problems in the children, along with improvements in parenting practices such as satisfaction, parental efficacy, and psychological adjustment of the parents. The study also highlighted the need for further research to better understand the parenting program and its long-term effects (Cassandra & Matthew, 2013).

### 3. Fatemeh Taher et al. (2019):

This study aimed to investigate the effect of the Triple P (Positive Parenting Program) on family functioning among parents of children with intellectual disabilities. A quasi-experimental method was applied to a sample of 30 mothers and fathers. Results showed that the program effectively improved family functioning in areas such as problem-solving, communication, roles, emotional responsiveness, emotional attachment, and overall family function. It concluded that the program significantly enhances comprehensive family function, although additional interventions are needed to address behavioral aspects (Fatemeh et al., 2019).

### 4. Lubna Bint Ayed Bin Zabin (2019):

This study examined the effectiveness of a family training program based on the "Floortime" strategy in improving parental self-efficacy and family interactions among families of children with autism spectrum disorder. The study used an experimental method with a sample of 20 mothers. The results showed a statistically significant improvement ($p <$ 0.05) in the post-test scores of the experimental group compared to the control group, as well as in pre- vs. post-test performance within the experimental group. The study provided practical evidence that poor parental competence and negative family interactions hinder the development of both parental and child capabilities, indicating the need for structured interventions (Bin Zabin, 2019).

### 5. Priscilla Souza et al. (2025):

This study aimed to explore the extent to which parenting programs include content aimed at improving parental involvement—specifically collaboration with parents in therapeutic plans—in families of children with disabilities. The research reviewed scientific literature and evaluated 22 studies that included 28 educational programs. A key finding was the observed lack of focus on parental participation. Although some interaction-related components were supported, the essential aspects of parent engagement remained largely neglected (Priscilla Souza et al., 2025).

After this brief review of studies on the application of parenting programs in families of children with special needs, it can be concluded that such programs have been scientifically proven to be beneficial to these families across various dimensions. However, some experimental studies have failed to confirm their effectiveness due to several possible reasons. Therefore, the continued investigation of parenting programs by academic researchers and experienced practitioners working directly with families of children with special needs is essential, particularly through diverse field studies.

## I – Conceptual Framework: Parenting Programs

## 1. Definition of Parenting Programs

The term *"parental"* or *"parenting"* is a derivative indicating all that relates to the parents or is attributed to them, including actions, behaviors, attitudes, and more (Abu Halaifah, 2015, p. 252). It refers to providing support and care in a way that fosters holistic development, strengthens the parent-child relationship, and reflects the parent's responsibility to meet their child's physical and psychological needs. It also involves guidance and creating an environment of love and encouragement that builds up the child rather than tearing them down. This definition includes three essential dimensions: responsibility, care, and guidance (Al-Murayib, 2013, p. 70).

According to Mahoney & Kaiser (1999), parenting programs entail equipping parents with information that enables them to interact effectively with their children. This includes teaching them specific strategies to support their children's developmental skills and to manage behavior in everyday life situations (Al-Qadi & Abdelsamee', 2020, p. 406).

Accordingly, parenting care programs can be defined as an integrated framework combining educational practices with psychosocial support to create a nurturing environment that enhances the child's physical, cognitive, and social development. These programs begin with ensuring physical protection by monitoring risks and providing basic needs such as balanced nutrition, comprehensive healthcare, and household stability. They also focus on enhancing cognitive skills through stimulating activities rooted in constructive language interactions, and promote social competence through encouraging cooperation and responsible decision-making within positive behavioral models.

Additionally, they build self-reliance progressively by granting the child safe spaces to develop confidence and assume age-appropriate responsibilities.

On the level of public policy, these programs align with five strategic pillars:

1. Strengthening family services through parenting guidance programs;

2. Enhancing community protection mechanisms to detect neglect;

3. Integrating early childhood curricula based on guided play;

4. Reinforcing healthcare systems through regular screenings;

5. Providing conditional cash transfers to families to ensure school enrollment and compliance with health visits.

This vision seeks to achieve an organic integration between family upbringing and cultural identity, grounded in scientific research to design interventions that balance individual child needs with broader societal requirements.

## 2. Theoretical Foundations of Parenting Programs

Prior to the 1960s, addressing children's behavioral problems commonly involved therapeutic approaches directed solely at the child or adolescent, such as psychoanalysis, psychotherapy, or institutionalizing the child.

However, starting in the 1960s, behavior modification theories began to emerge, such as Skinner's (1965) work, alongside social cognitive models (e.g., Bandura, 1977) and theories related to coercive family interactions (Patterson, 1982). These laid the groundwork for what became known as *parenting programs*, which are characterized by structured training materials, accreditation systems, and licensing protocols. These are often referred to as *family behavioral interventions* or *parent training programs*.

By the late 1960s, a shift in psychiatry and child psychology took place, where interventions began focusing on changing parental behavior, turning parents into active participants in therapeutic processes. This shift was driven by growing awareness of how parents influence their children's behavior (Devine et al., 2016).

According to Christine Nassar (2003), cited by Al-Jawalda (2017, p. 242), the modern global trend encourages the participation of parents of children with special needs in the services and programs designed for them—a trend now seen as essential and unavoidable in any effective intervention.

The following table summarizes the theoretical foundations that contributed to the development of parenting programs:

Table (1): Theoretical Foundations of Parenting Programs

| Behavioral Theories (Skinner, 1953) | Social Cognitive Models (Bandura, 1997) | Coercion Theory (Patterson, 1982) |
|---|---|---|
| Parents influence children's behavior through **positive reinforcement** or consequences, such as attention and praise. | Expectations and beliefs shape parental behaviors. Their knowledge and perceptions affect their confidence, decision-making, and intentions. | Coercive negative behaviors in families escalate due to reciprocal reinforcement. For example, a child whining causes a parent to withdraw a demand, reinforcing both behaviors. |
| Negative behaviors may be unintentionally reinforced by attention, while positive behaviors might be extinguished through lack of acknowledgment. | Parents need to understand their own interpretations of their child's behavior and target self-efficacy development through their interventions. | Parents must learn **positive behavior management strategies** as alternatives to coercive practices. |

(Devine et al., 2016)

We observe from the table above that these parenting-related theories served as a foundation for the development of programs that support and guide parents in dealing effectively with both typically developing and special needs children. This led to the emergence, spread, and utilization of *parenting programs* across families.

### 3. Objectives of Parenting Programs

Parenting programs aim to improve the quality of family care through modifying parental behaviors, i.e., training them in skills such as cooperative play and positive praise. They also apply clear rules to limit negative behaviors. Likewise, these programs play a role in prevention and treatment; they contribute to addressing behavioral disorders (such as aggression) and psychological disorders (such as depression) and help those with developmental disorders (such as autism spectrum disorder and attention deficit hyperactivity disorder) by managing the behavioral problems associated with them, preventing complications in adolescence, and reducing the risks of school deviation and drug use in later stages (Devina et al., 2016).

It should also be noted that parenting programs serve the interests of families of children with special needs. Stewart (1996) sees that the goal of counseling parents of children with special needs is to help these parents exert the utmost of their ability and energy for adaptation, growth, and change, which helps them deal optimally with their children (Hanafi, 2015, p. 206).

The ultimate goal of parenting program services is to help parents accept their child's disability—if disabled—as a circumstance willed by God, without comparing them to non-disabled individuals. Accordingly, parents must be helped to see their children's conditions clearly and to make the necessary decisions in light of reality. In this way, the child with special needs can be helped to grow to the fullest extent his abilities and special aptitudes allow, so that he can live happily, productively, and in interaction with others (Al-Daheri, 2015, p. 101).

As concluded from the above, parenting programs aim to develop the skills of fathers and mothers to enhance family care, with a focus on prevention and treatment to address behavioral and developmental disorders, and to support those with special needs by helping families accept disability and make realistic decisions to develop the child's abilities to the maximum, and protect adolescents to reduce the risks of school deviation or addiction through early interventions.

## 4. Classifications of Parenting Programs

The review conducted by Bunting (2004), cited in Al-Hassan (2009), identified a number of theoretical frameworks that used different types of parenting programs, including:

- Behavioral Parenting Programs: Based on principles of social learning, and aimed at teaching parents to use a set of basic behavioral techniques such as positive reinforcement, negotiation, and finding alternatives to punishment.

- Cognitive Behavioral Parenting Programs: Combine basic behavioral strategies with cognitive strategies aimed at helping parents restructure their thinking about themselves and their children.

- Relationship-Based Parenting Programs: Aim to enhance family relationships.

- Rational Emotive Therapy Parenting Programs: Aim to reduce emotional stress by questioning irrational beliefs and promoting rational beliefs.

- Multi-Modal Parenting Programs: Combine components of other programs in addition to behavioral and/or cognitive strategies (Doha International Family Institute, 2018, p. 28).

Based on the above, it is noted that the classifications of parenting programs are founded upon their theories, the most important of which are behavioral theory, cognitive behavioral theory, and others.

## 5. Examples of Parenting Programs

Among them:

- Family Support Program: Focuses on parenting skills and children's social skills, as well as family life skills. It is applied to the parents of children from preschool to early adolescence who are at risk of issues related to drug use, crime, and deviant behavior.

- The Incredible Years Program (Webster-Stratton & Reid, 2015): There is a preventive version and a therapeutic version, directed at families of infants and children in early and middle childhood.

- Triple P – Positive Parenting Program: Targets prevention and treatment of behavioral and emotional problems suffered by children and adolescents. The program can be delivered via individual counseling, group courses, or online. It can target any age from birth to sixteen years, and specialized programs exist targeting children or parents with disabilities or those suffering from health problems, etc. (Devina et al., 2016). Researchers (Hieneman, Childs & Sergay, 2006) discussed it in the Parent Support Guide, which includes a set of strategies for parental support in this program, as it can be applied and implemented by the parents themselves for their children. The program includes plans, goals, behaviors, as well as specific patterns, methods of work and application, and finally, results must be monitored (Meem, Karen & Jan, 2011, pp. 117–118).

From the above, it is concluded that parenting programs integrate to build comprehensive family skills, ranging from early prevention to specialized therapeutic intervention, while taking into account the diversity of needs and age stages.

## II. Families of Children with Special Needs

A family of children with special needs is defined as a family composed of a father, mother, and a child with a disability, with or without other children—whether typical or also with disabilities. This type of family faces a set of psychological, social, and economic problems due to the presence of this child, which affects the nature of their life.

### 1. The Concept of Individuals with Special Needs:

Jalal (2020) views individuals with special needs as "those individuals who deviate from the normal or average level in a specific trait, or in one or more aspects of personality, to the degree that necessitates their need for special services, different from those provided to their typical peers, in order to help them achieve the maximum growth and adjustment possible" (Saafan, Abu Halimah & Safouh, 2022, p. 359).

Sobhi (1994) also points out that "the term 'children with special needs' refers to that group of children who significantly deviate from the general average of typical individuals in their cognitive, sensory, emotional, motor, and language development, which calls for special attention from educators in terms of diagnosis methods, development of educational programs, and the selection of appropriate teaching methods."

It should be noted that various sciences, including psychiatry, psychology, and neurology, are constantly evolving, and therefore new categories are being introduced and terminology is changing. The categories of individuals with special

needs include: intellectual disability, hearing impairment, visual impairment, physical and health impairments, learning disorders, behavioral disorders, communication disorders, autism, and giftedness and talent.

## 2- Challenges Facing Families of Children with Special Needs

The consequences of disability, developmental disorders, and the problems resulting from them are not limited to the child alone, but extend to the entire family and all its members—albeit to varying degrees. Families often find themselves in difficult situations that require them to seek services for their child, whether these services are psychological, social, educational, medical, or rehabilitative. Raising a child with special needs is a highly demanding task for most families across human societies (Qaryouti, 2009, p. 4).

Families of children with special needs also face a wide range of challenges, including:

- **Health Issues:** Starting with the problem of diagnosis and treatment, which is among the most significant difficulties families face, especially in the absence of specialized centers for diagnosing and assessing disabilities—particularly ambiguous ones like autism spectrum disorder.

- **Social Problems:** Families with a child with special needs face several social challenges, primarily due to the attitudes of extended family, neighbors, and friends. Qaryouti et al. (2003) noted that the family's activities are affected; for example, they hesitate to plan vacations, make visits, or attend celebrations. The family must re-evaluate its activities in light of the presence of a child with special needs.

- **Awareness Problems:** Families face awareness-related problems due to the continued lack of knowledge in all sectors of society regarding the understanding and acceptance of a child with a disability. Some in the community perceive children with special needs as "normal" based solely on their appearance. This perception stems from poor awareness of these conditions in society.

- **Economic Problems:** It is commonly known that having a child with a disability in the family drains its financial resources due to the high costs of special education, medical treatment or surgery, assistive tools and devices, or training sessions. This imposes considerable pressure on the family—especially if the child needs a companion during hospital stays or frequent visits to clinics or rehabilitation centers.

- **Psychological Problems:** The presence of a child with special needs is a major source of psychological and emotional stress, and may even weaken family bonds—particularly between parents. In many cases, the father cannot bear the situation and may abandon the home, separate from his wife, or the couple may get divorced.

- **Training Problems:** Training is the second half of the educational process. Knowledge of disability is important, but knowledge without training cannot yield the desired outcomes. The First International Autism Conference held in Kuwait in 2000 emphasized the importance of both knowledge and training. Theo Peters (2000, p. 49) stated: "Learning and understanding what is written in books is important, but books only tell us half the story." There is a lack of proper training and guidance for families—especially parents—on how to deal with their child, whether at home or in society (Al Saud, 2015).

Findings from research and studies show that the most common parental responses and reactions to the crisis of having a child with special needs include: feelings of shock, amazement, and disappointment; questioning and denying the diagnosis; feelings of frustration, sorrow, and grief; excessive fear about many aspects; confusion, disorientation, and inability to realistically face the problem; deep guilt and self-blame; rejection of the child with special needs and depression; searching for a cure at any cost; reorganizing the situation and gaining full awareness of it; accepting the child's condition and adapting to reality (Mansour & Al-Qoul, 2021, p. 47).

It is also worth noting that the type of special need, the nature and severity of the disability, and the age at which it occurs all affect the psychological, familial, and social aspects of life—and this is reflected in how individuals respond to those aspects.

It can also be concluded that initiatives to improve the family and social environments surrounding children and adolescents with special needs are on the rise, particularly with growing evidence of the effectiveness of family programs and home-based care as a cornerstone of early intervention strategies. These programs serve a preventive role in reducing the escalation of disabilities among at-risk groups (such as children from families with difficult circumstances), in addition to their therapeutic role in managing existing disabilities and improving the quality of life for children with special needs—whether in terms of developing daily skills or enhancing social integration.

## III. Discussion of the Study's Findings

After presenting the previous studies and the conceptual framework on parenting programs and families of children with special needs, the two questions posed in the current study can be answered through the following conclusions:

### 1. The Importance of Parenting Programs for Families of Children with Special Needs:

The importance of parenting programs for families of children with special needs lies in the following:

Durand & Hieneman (2008) indicate that parenting programs enable parents to support their children's positive behavior by assessing their behaviors and preventing them from engaging in undesirable behaviors that they may learn from their disruptive peers. It is worth noting that changing such behaviors requires equipping children with new skills that enable them to face challenges in various situations. (Al-Qadi & Abd Al-Sami', 2020, p. 407)

According to Biglan et al. (2012), the importance of raising children in a family environment characterized by care and support cannot be underestimated, as raising children in a warm environment fueled by love puts them on a positive developmental trajectory that helps ensure success in their future (Divina et al., 2016).

Furthermore, Swap (1993) considered that although parents of children with special needs may lack teaching experience and may not understand the rules necessary to meet their children's educational needs, some parents desire to help with educational planning and to participate in their children's educational programs. Some studies even found that some parents were more beneficial than counselors and teachers in setting educational and vocational plans for their children.

Welsh & Odum (1981) reported a consensus among specialists working in child care centers that parental participation in their children's educational programs is necessary if developmental achievements are to be realized and sustained (Abdat, 2009, p. 6).

What also makes parenting programs essential is their potential contribution in overcoming behavioral problems, whose effects extend to several dimensions, including:

- **Delayed Learning and Development:** For example, children may have difficulties sitting for reading or participating in sports teams. Because they are more disruptive and resistant, they may miss out on important experiences. As a result, problematic behavior can hinder children's social, mental, and even physical development.

- **Disruption of Family and Community Life:** Problematic behavior does not only disturb the individual but also affects everyone around them. Children's behavioral problems lead to marital pressures, disrupt family order, and conflict with family harmony. Its cumulative effect is inevitable.

- **Destruction of Relationships:** Having to deal with problematic behavior according to standard rules can destroy the relationship between parents and their children and other family members. It is often emotionally exhausting—especially when parents believe they must adhere to a strict punishment regime instead of spending time playing and enjoying moments with their children. Disputes may arise between the parents regarding possible solutions, leading to disagreement, misunderstandings, and conflicts (Mim, Karen, & Jan, 2011, pp. 32–34).

Brookman (2004) noted that families become more empowered when they are involved in parenting programs that are parent-centered, which contribute to developing their skills, knowledge, and experiences more than expert-centered programs. When parents receive feedback based on their own performance, it is simply more effective than merely watching someone else perform. This, in turn, reduces parental stress, pressure, feelings of helplessness, depression, and frustration (Bin Zabin, 2019, p. 18).

It can be concluded that the importance of parenting programs for families of children with special needs lies in the fact that they are not merely tools for behavior control, but rather a comprehensive strategy for building families capable of promoting the holistic development of children—especially those with special needs—and reducing the negative impact of the various problems faced by the family and society. Additionally, they help achieve family balance based on mutual support rather than conflict.

### 2. Supporting Factors Included in Parenting Programs to Overcome the Challenges Faced by Families of Children with Special Needs

When parents are blessed with a child with special needs, the entire family faces challenges and difficulties. The following are among the supporting factors embedded in parenting programs to help overcome these challenges:

• **Acceptance of the Child with Special Needs by Family Members:** The diagnosis of a disability or developmental disorder in a child causes profound grief for both mothers and fathers, especially when additional difficulties such as financial and medical burdens accumulate. Parents typically go through successive emotional stages, starting with shock and denial, followed by sadness and mourning, then shame and fear, then anger and guilt. Often, this is followed by unrealistic hope or denial, or even overprotection of the child. Eventually, parents may reach adaptation and acceptance. This process

strengthens the relationship between them, as without mutual support, they would struggle to cope with the challenges and pressures stemming from their child's condition. Acceptance contributes to emotional stability and quality of life, motivating parents to rehabilitate and secure a future for their child (Abd Al-Salam, 2002). This acceptance can be achieved in families that are aware of their child's needs and how to address them, which is facilitated through parenting programs that provide appropriate training and targeted skill development.

• **Raising Awareness and Training Siblings of the Child with Special Needs:** The presence of a child with a disability in the family does not only affect the parents—it also impacts other family members, especially non-disabled siblings. Assigning them caregiving responsibilities may result in psychological pressure, feelings of guilt, anger, irritability, or jealousy toward the disabled sibling due to the attention and care they receive from the parents. At the same time, there may also be positive effects, such as increased resilience, patience, perseverance, compassion, kindness, and non-aggressive problem-solving skills (Abdat, 2007). These positive outcomes will not naturally emerge unless proper awareness and training are provided to siblings through parenting programs.

• **Availability of Financial Resources:** A family's financial capabilities significantly affect its ability to cope with the situation. When financial resources are available, the family is better equipped to manage the demands of raising a child with special needs. These needs often entail significant financial burdens, such as the high cost of medical treatments, surgeries (e.g., cochlear implants, limb operations), medications, specialized tools and equipment, and speech or physical therapy. Insufficient financial resources result in psychological, social, and economic pressures that weigh heavily on the family and prevent them from fulfilling their own needs (Qaryouti, 2009, p. 4). Parenting programs provide guidance sessions that suggest ways to manage monthly income, introduce small business ideas that can support families of children with special needs, and connect them with charitable organizations that offer financial aid and needed resources.

• **Parental Involvement in the Educational and Rehabilitative Activities of the Child with Special Needs:** The justification for involving parents in activities directed at their child with special needs can be summarized as follows:

- The benefits of parental interaction and participation extend beyond the targeted child to other children in the home.

- Parents are service recipients who often bear the costs, and if they are satisfied, they become the strongest advocates for their child's program and the services provided.

- Parents have the right to participate in ensuring harmony between the child's upbringing, rehabilitation, and the family's personal values and goals.

- Parents help transfer the effects of learning and training from the institution to the home (Abdat, 2009).

• **Psychological and Social Support for Families of Children with Special Needs:** Jalal (2007) defined this support as the acquisition of knowledge, skills, and competencies necessary for decision-making and prioritization in fulfilling one's roles. Mansour (2009) described it as the process of providing all forms of support and assistance to families of children with disabilities, including formal services provided by professionals, institutions, and public and private organizations. Abdul Hadi (2013) explained that psychological and social support aims to protect mental and social well-being, prevent and treat psychological disorders, and reduce the burden of disability and its negative consequences—whether physical or psychological. Support can take many forms, including social, formal, informational, and others (Naaman, 2022, pp. 54–55).

So, parenting programs can offer integrated solutions to help families face the challenges of raising children with special needs. They do so by enhancing family acceptance, training siblings, providing mechanisms for financial management, involving parents in the rehabilitation process, and building a sustainable network of psychological and social support.

## Conclusion

Parents play a central role in meeting their children's needs, supervising their upbringing, and ensuring their care and well-being in the manner they believe is most appropriate. However, despite their commitment to doing so correctly, parents may sometimes find themselves struggling to respond appropriately to their children's developmental stages or to emerging differences, whether acquired or innate. Among such differences are disabilities or specific developmental disorders that children may be born with or develop later. Parents of such children are in need of **parenting programs** that provide them with the necessary knowledge and support to help them address the challenges encountered throughout their caregiving journey.

This study has elaborated on the importance of these programs and their role in assisting families of children with special needs. Based on the findings presented, the following recommendations are proposed:

• Support and conduct research focused on how to construct effective parenting programs tailored to the needs of families of children with special needs. These efforts should be led by professionals, administrators, educators, and decision-makers who can contribute to establishing the legal and financial frameworks necessary to ensure the successful development and implementation of such programs for the real benefit of these families.

• Provide parents with essential information and training to enable their active and purposeful participation in their children's care, support, and rehabilitation. This can be achieved through workshops, conferences, and awareness campaigns encouraging parents to demand the availability of educational, instructional, and training programs that are family-centered.

• Enact laws, policies, and development **plans** that encourage and support the establishment and dissemination of parenting programs across all specialized centers—whether public or private—that serve children and adolescents with special needs. These programs should be made **compulsory** for families to ensure equitable access and benefit.

• Leverage social media platforms such as Facebook, YouTube, and others to raise awareness among parents about the existence and importance of parenting programs designed specifically for them. The process of treating and rehabilitating a child with special needs must begin with their parents.

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