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### Online parenting support: Guiding parents towards empowerment through single session email consultation

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## Summary

Internet technology offers a lot of new opportunities for the dissemination of information, sharing of support and consultation of professionals. The research for this dissertation is situated in the full flow of rapid technological developments, which bring us not only new devices and easy access to resources, but which also urge the need for new skills, design guidelines and pose dilemmas for practitioners. Innovating professionals from multiple disciplines have begun to exploit the new opportunities for parenting support. The studies, presented in this dissertation, are meant to deepen our insights in the subject of online parenting support and investigate the feasibility to use single session email consultation to empower parents.

In *chapter 1* empirical studies on peer and professional online support for parents ( $n = 75$ ) were systematically reviewed, including randomized controlled trials and quasi-experimental designs (totaling 1,615 parents and 740 children) and content analyses of emails and posts (totaling 15,059 coded messages). These studies generally reported positive outcomes of online parenting support. The results of this review show that the Internet offers a variety of opportunities for sharing peer support and consulting professionals.

In *chapter 2* a systematic review was undertaken of studies ( $n = 19$ ), that describe parenting programs of which the primary components were delivered online. Twelve studies (with in total 54 outcomes,  $N_{tot}$  parents = 1,615 and  $N_{tot}$  children = 740) were included in a meta-analysis. The meta-analytic results show that online interventions can make a significant positive contribution for parents and children.

In *chapter 3* we aimed to determine if and how practitioner response in single session email consultation matches the need of parents. We conducted a content analysis of single session email consultations (129 questions; 5,997 response sentences). Three perspectives on the parent-practitioner communication were distinguished to assess the

match between parenting questions and consultations, i.e., the expert oriented, parent oriented and context oriented perspective. We found that professionals have a broad approach to email consultation, offering advice of different perspectives, rather than restricting the advice to match a prevalent parental need.

In *chapter 4*, based on empowerment theory, we developed the Guiding the Empowerment Process model (GEP model), which describes techniques to guide the parent towards more empowerment. The model showed good inter-observer reliability and internal consistency and evidence for its concurrent validity with the Social Support model was confirmed, although it was also distinctive. Feasibility of the GEP model for content analysis of email consultation in parental support from a theoretical empowerment perspective has been demonstrated.

Finally, in *chapter 5* we evaluated the effect of single session email consultation on empowerment of parents (n=96). A group of practitioners was trained to match the need of the parent and they learned to use empowerment oriented techniques. Parents showed a significant increase in self-confidence after receiving the email advice. Thus, study findings lend support to the feasibility of single session email consultation as a brief intervention to improve self-confidence of parents. The training for practitioners did not influence the outcomes.

Online services have the potential to reach a wide audience of parents. This dissertation describes design characteristics and identifies factors which positively influence effects across parent and child outcomes. Furthermore, in our studies we analyzed single session email consultation and investigated its use as an empowering method to support parents. Within its limitations, study findings lend support to the feasibility of single session email consultation as a brief intervention to improve self-confidence of parents.