

Stepping Stones Triple P (SSTP)

Stepping Stones Triple P (SSTP) is a parent program to parents with children with disability. In SSTP the parents learn strategies on how they support the child and promote good behaviour and development.

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Stepping Stones Triple P (SSTP) is a parental program that is aimed at families with children up to 12 years-old with special needs and disability, including children with cerebral palsy.

SSTP includes Triple P-parent education methods to prevent and handle severe behavioural, emotional and developmental challenges of children in general. SSTP also introduces additional strategies to handle disability relevant issues. SSTP is constructed of five steps about positive parenthood that includes

1. a general information strategy
2. training seminars
3. short-term individual process or discussion groups
4. intensive individual program or group sessions
5. extended family program

Each step is aimed at different needs of the parents and has an increasing degree of intensity from step one to step five.

In Denmark step two, four and five can be offered in different modules, whichever the family prefers, and which support is being sought. The steps can either be used independently or combined.

SSTP is developed in Australia and used at the end of 2019 in 22 different countries around the world, e.g. USA, Canada, Germany and Switzerland. The program is tested in five municipalities in Denmark and evaluated by VIVE – The National Research- and Analysis Centre for Welfare in 2018. The program is implemented in additional 10-18 Danish municipalities from 2019.

RCT-studies and systematic reviews show that Stepping Stones Triple P (SSTP) has a significant positive effect on behavioural and emotional symptoms of children with cerebral palsy and a positive influence on parental mastering. A Danish study from VIVE from 2018 found among other things that parents who participated in SSTP,

- became less stressed
- experienced more well-being
- experienced more satisfaction and mastering of the parent role.

In 2018 VIVE has conducted a cast assessment of SSTP.

Target-group

The target-group for Stepping Stones Triple P (SSTP) is parents to children with special needs and disability, including cerebral palsy.

Stepping Stones Triple P (SSTP) can be used for most parents, who have children in the age range two to twelve years-old with moderate to severe behavioural- and emotional problems, including cerebral palsy. SSTP can be used regardless of cultural, religious or linguistic background of the parents (Whittingham. 2014).

SSTP provides that parents choose their own goals on basis of the issues that they experience in the everyday life and their values. From this the SSTP practitioner and the parents prepare strategies on how the parents can achieve the goals.

SSTP is built up on five steps that is about positive parenting. Each step is aimed at different needs of the parents and increases in intensity from step one to five:

- SSTP step one is a general information initiative about positive parenthood in families with disability.
- SSTP step two and three are broad initiatives aimed at parents, who experience moderate issues with their children.
- Step four and five are more intensive initiatives that are aimed at parents to children with severe behavioural- and emotional issues, where the parents also have problems of various character (Whittingham et al. 2014).

In Denmark one has for the time being (January 2020) chosen to translate and implement step two, four and five.

Sources

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Method

Stepping Stones Triple P (SSTP) has focus on giving parents tools for how they can handle behaviour of their child in an appropriate way.

The purpose with Stepping Stones Triple P (SSTP) is to strengthen the skill of the parents to master everyday life with a child with disability, as well as making the parents able to solve the issues, they experience in their everyday life.

The method builds on:

- Social learning theory
- Cognitive behaviour theory
- Development psychology
- Research on risk factors connected with development of social issues and behavioural problems of children.

Structure of the SSTP-initiative

SSTP consists of five steps. Within each step there are various modules, all depending on what the parents are interested in and has need for. The modules in each step is precisely described in relation to content, form, time usage, and what is required by qualifications of the teacher (Triple P International, 2017a, 2017b, 2017c, 2017d, 2017e, 2017f).

For each module, there is prepared materials in form of worksheets, leaflets and workbooks.

Before the courses start, the accredited SSTP-coach interviews the parents to get knowledge about the worries that the parents have for their children (Triple P International, 2017c, 2017e).

It is also clarified, what the family wishes to achieve with the process. The family can also fill out a questionnaire about behaviour and feelings of their child and describe own parent roles and parenting style (Triple P International, 2017a, 2017b, 2017c, 2017d, 2017e, 2017f).

After the end of a SSTP-course the STTP-trainer can ask the family about filling out the questionnaire again to identify changes. Additionally, the STTP-trainer will interview the family to identify, whether goals and wished results that were set prior to the course start has been achieved (Triple P International, 2017e).

Steps in the SSTP-initiative

Step one: General information strategy

Step one works with general community educational initiatives regarding positive parenthood in families with children with disabilities (Triple P International, without year).

This step is not yet implemented and tested in Danish context.

Step two: Selected Stepping Stones Triple P-seminar

Step two Selected Seminar is a module for 20-200 participants consisting of three seminars of 90 minutes each (Triple P International, 2017e)

The module is designed to give parents a brief introduction to the principles in order to

- Exhibit a positive parenting role
- Teach the child new skills
- Change behavioural problems of the child (Triple P International, 2017e).

The module is aimed at parents with specific worries for behaviour and development of their child. Additionally, it is directed towards parents, who are interested in general information about, how you support development of your child. Parents, who have additional and more extensive problems in form of stress, depression or a child with complex behavioural problems will typically need participation on other levels of SSTP (Triple P International, 2017e).

Content and focus of the seminar

The seminars have the following content and focus:

- Seminar one: Positive parenthood in relation to children with disability: focusing on creating a positive parent role in relation to children with disability.
- Seminar two: Help your child to use their full potential: focus on strengthening opportunities of the parents to help their child with reaching their potential.
- Seminar three: Turn problematic behaviour into positive behaviour: focus on changing problematic behaviour into positive behaviour (Triple P International, 2017e).

Step three: Primary Care Stepping Stones Triple P

This step is not yet implemented in Danish context. However, sub-elements from the level are also seen on the other levels, among other things contact forms between SSTP-coach and family. Step three is an individual course that includes a short-term one to one parent intervention that is aimed at individual issues related to behaviour or developmental skills of the child (Triple P International, 2017d).

Step three consists of four sessions. The first two sessions are with personal attendance. The two other sessions can be performed personally or via phone. The Accredited SSTO-trainer can meet with the family

over a six-week period, where he/she can help the parents with developing plans on how they prevent problematic behaviour, and where they learn necessary abilities on handling inappropriate behaviour (Triple P International, 2017d).

The sessions focus on:

- Session one: Assessment of the presented issue
- Session two: Development of a parental plan
- Session three: Assessment of the implementation
- Session four: Follow-up (Triple P International, 2017d).

Read about the content in Primary Care Stepping Stones Triple P on the website of Triple P (pdf)

Step four: Group Stepping Stones Triple P: Group process

The Group process consists of six sessions that are held each week (approx.). The sessions are ideally run in groups of 10-12 parents with a focus on education and active training of skills of the parents. Additionally, the course has three individual phone consultations, which aim to further develop parental skills and develop independent problem-solving skills. Thus, the course is aimed at supporting parents in preventing the development of behavioural problems or to change a problematic behaviour, already taking place (Triple P International, 2017c).

The group sessions focus on:

- Group session one: Positive parenting
- Group session two: Supporting development of the child
- Group session three: Learning new skills and behaviour
- Group session four: Handling inappropriate behaviour and parenting skills
- Group session five: Planning ahead
- Group session six-eight: Using and implementing strategies for positive parenting
- Group session nine: End of the program (Triple P International, 2017c).

Read about the content in Group Stepping Stones Triple P on the website of Triple P (pdf)

Step four: Standard Stepping Stones Triple P

Step four standard SSTP is an intensive and broad focused individual intervention. The course contains 10 weekly sessions, where there is focus on the parents learning a variety of skills for, how they can support development and potentials of their child (Triple P International, 2017f).

The intervention deals with a thorough investigation of the parent-child interaction. Additionally, the intervention contains a description of skills of the parents on a wide range of behavioural dimensions and of general strategies for promoting parental mastering skills (Triple P International, 2017f).

The process consists of 10 sessions in total, which includes

- two evaluation sessions
- two sessions about positive parenting skills
- three practice sessions
- two sessions with training in planning activities
- one end session (Triple P International, 2017f).

On these 10 sessions teach the parents the following skills within four main categories:

- Skills for strengthening the relationship between parents and child
- Skills in promoting appropriate behaviour
- Skills in teaching children new behaviour patterns and skills
- Skills in handling problem-creating behaviour (Triple P International, 2017f).

Step five: Family Transitions Triple P

This step is not yet implemented and tested in Danish context. Step five, Family Transitions Triple P is aimed at parents, who experience difficulties after a separation or divorce (Triple P International, 2017b).

Family Transitions Triple P is a family-based intervention based on cognitive behaviour therapy. The course consists of five group sessions to the parents, including a two-day training program (Triple P International, 2017b).

Follow-up to the training program a few weeks later, where learned competences and skills of the parents are evaluated. The module aims to provide tools to handle conflicts with the previous spouse, accommodate difficult feelings and handle the transition from being a two-parent-family to a single-parent-family (Triple P International, 2017b).

Step five: Enhanced Triple P – extended SSTP

Extended SSTP targets parents, who have completed group process or standard SSTP, but who still experience some difficulties in relation to the parenting role e.g. due to

- continuing problem-behaviour of the child
- own affect regulation
- conflicts with the partner/spouse and similar (Triple P International, 2017a).

The step also targets parents, if child has very complex behavioural challenges that challenges the whole family life (Triple P International, 2017a).

The module consists of

- an interview, which contains a short assessment of progress until now
- three individual modules, which each consist of up to three sessions
- a final module (Triple P International, 2017a).

The three individual modules consist of

- **practice.** Here, parents are advised on implementing new skills.
- **mastery skills.** The module aims at parents, who experience that they have emotional challenges, and where these challenges affect their parental role. Here, the parents learn a variety of cognitive and behavioural strategies to handle moods and accommodate everyday stress.
- **partner support.** The module aims at parents, who have difficulties by matching their relation or having difficulty of communicating with both the child, the surroundings and the other parent. The parents are introduced to several different skills that can strengthen their cooperation as parents, including skills in communication and problem solving (Triple P International, 2017a).

At the final module the parents have opportunity to practice and together with the accredited SSTP-coach lay a plan for the future (Triple P International, 2017a).

The goal of the course that the parents get knowledge and skills in relation to:

- assessment of personal and relational adjustment of the parents
- specific strategies to strengthening personal skills and reduce stress, anxiety and depression of the parents
- to reduce parent conflicts, strengthen communicative skills of the parents and promote parent support
- to support the parents with developing skills to independent problem-solution
- strategies to promote general and sustained changes of behaviour (Triple P International, 2017a).

Read more about content of the initiative on website of Triple P

Sources

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Implementation

Stepping Stones Triple P (SSTP) makes demands on the training of the professionals, which performs the initiative, and for the conduct of the various sessions. Courses, including time consumption and form is described in a manual.

As accredited SSTP-practitioner, you must have completed a course, which both contains theory and practical learning in connection with using the program. Preparation of the accreditation consists of workshops and individual supervision, and the accreditation itself takes place as an exam with individual feedback (Triple P UK, 2015). The education for SSTP-practitioner is led by an SSTP-coach. The SSTP-coach is an accredited practitioner, who subsequently is further educated as a SSTP-coach.

The accredited SSTP practitioner basically has an education within the health sector, the pedagogical or the social area. It is expected that the SSTP-practitioner has knowledge on development of children and youths and/or have experience working with families and has access to regular supervision and support (Triple P UK, 2015).

In the SSTP-steps that are implemented in Denmark, the SSTP-education has a duration of eight days of training and two days of accreditation as well as a day for pre-accreditation. Additionally, time for preparation before accreditation must be calculated (Triple P UK, 2015).

Education for SSTP-practitioner

It is Triple P International in cooperation with University of Queensland, which owns Triple P and SSTP, and the education of future SSTP practitioners occur with contact to Triple P. The National Board of Social Services can offer support to education and implementation of Stepping Stones in cooperation with Triple P International.

If interested in the education, please contact the National Board of Social Services (The National Board of Social Services, 2019).

Read more about support to SSTP on website of the National Board of Social Services (The National Board of Social Services, 2019).

SSTP is developed in Australia and used at the exit of 2019 in 22 different countries around the world, among other things in USA, Canada, Germany, Switzerland and Denmark. The program was tested in five municipalities in Denmark and evaluated by VIVE – The National Research- and Analysis centre for Welfare in 2018. Several of the municipalities still uses SSTP as initiative. The program is implemented in additional 10-18 Danish municipalities from 2019.

Evaluation of testing of SSTP in five Danish municipalities

An evaluation made by VIVE in 2018 has among other things examined the experience of five Danish municipalities with implementing SSTP (VIVE, 2018).

The evaluation shows that the municipalities chose that SSTP should be attached to the disability unit knowing that the initiative also is dependent of other units in the municipality. SSTP has been organised around employees, who typically work as

- family counsellors
- psychologists in PPR (Pedagogical Psychological Counselling)
- pedagogical educated contact persons
- counsellors (VIVE, 2018).

It varies, whether the employee groups are composed of employees from same unit or across units. Two municipalities have had focus on putting together an interdisciplinary group with employees from units with authority function and units with performance function (VIVE, 2018).

All five municipalities have recruited parents through municipal employees with authority function and among parents, who the employees or their closest colleagues have known in advance. Two municipalities have also recruited parents through notices in special schools and in special day-care. Here the experiences have proved both positive and barely so positive (VIVE, 2018).

Additionally, two municipalities have had focus on informing healthcare and school principals, so they could pass on information and motivate parent to participate in SSTP. This strategy has so far not been effective, but it is still tested (VIVE, 2018).

Experiences of the municipalities with organising SSTP-seminars is that organisation of evening classes instead of afternoon classes can ensure a high attendance among the parents. Thereby, the parents can manage to pick-up and have their children looked after before the seminar and thus have calmness, when they arrive to the education (VIVE, 2018).

Promoters and inhibitors in the implementation

The five chosen municipalities, which have tested SSTP pointed at factors that have helped to promote or inhibit implementation of SSTP (VIVE, 2018).

Promoting factors for implementation

Management support

SSTP requires economic resources and a big initiative from employees in the municipalities. From one organizational perspective, the management support can be ensured by placing a formal management responsibility for SSTP among central managers. The implementation of SSTP is dependent on prioritization of SSTP by the SSTP. Additionally, the implementation is dependent on the prioritization of SSTP by the other employees, since they must help recruit parents to the initiative (VIVE, 2018).

Meaningfulness of Stepping Stones

Consistency between SSTP and Danish principles for professional social work contributes to the fact that SSTP is experienced as meaningful, and it is thereby a strength of the implementation (VIVE, 2018).

Ownership

The education in SSTP and Danish principles for professional social work with the initiative. Additionally, the education of several SSTP-practitioners has at the same time created the experience of being a team with opportunity to develop together and continuously spar about SSTP. Both factors are promoting for the implementation and subsequent use of SSTP in the municipalities. The experience is also that it is important to gain experience as an SSTP practitioner, just after you have been in the education (VIVE, 2018).

Inhabiting factors for implementation

However, there are also factors that have inhabited the implementation of elements in the initiative. SSTP does not give the SSTP-practitioners opportunity to give the parents advice and guidance on what the specific disability of their child entail, and how they can best handle issues that are related to it (VIVE, 2018).

The experience is that the parents can be an inhabiting factor, if the cooperation across is challenged and there is not enough knowledge about SSTP in the organization. Several of the Danish municipalities have solved this factor without issues. The municipalities have at the same time experiences that it is promoting for implementation and interest in SSTP with the broad ownership (VIVE, 2018.).

Based on the results from testing of SSTP in five Danish municipalities, SSTP is from 2019 extended to several Danish municipalities in cooperation with the National Board of Social Services.

Read the evaluation report of SSTP on the website of VIVE (pdf)

Read about the work of the National Board of Social Services with spreading SSTP on the website of the National Board of Social Services

Sources

VIVE (2018): Mastery among parents to children with disabilities: Evaluation of effect, economy and implementation of the mastery program. CpH.: VIVE.

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Effect

A number of RCT-studies show that Stepping Stones Triple P (SSTP) has a significantly positive effect in relation to parents with cerebral palsy, autism and other disabilities.

An evaluation from VIVE – The National Research and Analysis center for Welfare has examined the effect of Stepping Stones Triple P (SSTP) for the Danish parent, who has a child with disability, and their mastery of the everyday life (VIVE, 2018).

The evaluation is based on questionnaire surveys, which consists of a combination of primarily international validated tools, a number of background questions and questions that illustrate the specific expected results (VIVE, 2018).

The effect of SSTP is evaluated by a number of surveys before and after participation of the parents, as well as via follow-up studies conducted three and six months after finished efforts (VIVE, 2018).

Here, one found the following parameters:

- Reduced stress level (significant for both mother and father, but mostly father)
- Increased well-being (significant for both mother and father, but mostly father)
- Increased satisfaction with the parent role (significant for both mother and father, but mostly father)
- Increased mastering of the parent role (significant for both mother and father, but mostly father)
- Improvement of the general situation for the family (VIVE, 2018).

Read the whole evaluation on the website of VIVE (pdf)

International studies of SSTP and cerebral palsy

In addition to the Danish evaluation of SSTP, there is a number of international studies of SSTP, which includes children with cerebral palsy.

SSTP as evidence-based intervention

A systematic review of systematic review had the purpose to describe the best available interventions to children with cerebral palsy. The review mentions interventions targeted towards development of social and behavioural skills of children with cerebral palsy, which has best possible evidence. This includes SSTP (Novak et al., 2013).

Review and meta-analysis show significant positive effect

A systematic review and a meta-analysis, which had the purpose to evaluate the effect of SSTP to children with disability, including children with cerebral palsy, shown a significant positive effect in relation to among other things

- The parent role
- Satisfaction of the parents
- Adjustment of the parents
- Relation of the parents
- Behaviour of the child (Tellegen & Sanders, 2013).

The review contains among other things two RCT-studies:

1. A RCT-study, which had the purpose to examine the effect of group-based SSTP of children with different disabilities, including cerebral palsy, shows a significant improvement in experience of the parents of behaviour of the child, the parent role, satisfaction of parents and in relation to conflict between the parents (Roux et al., 2013).
2. A RCT-study, which had the purpose to examine the effect of a short group-based SSTP-course of children with various disabilities, including cerebral palsy, shows a significant positive effect on behavioural issues of the child, the parent role and in regards to conflicts between the parents (Sofronoff et al., 2011).

RCT-study examines SSTP and ACT (Acceptance and Commitment Therapy)

A RCT-study had the purpose to examine the effect of SSTP and SSTP combined with Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT) on families with children with cerebral palsy. ACT is a behaviour therapy, which focuses on mindfulness and accept of different challenges and circumstances of life and on living life in accordance with your personal values. The results showed that SSTP is an effective effort aimed towards behaviour and emotional issues of children with cerebral palsy, and that ACT can add additional advantages (Whittingham K. et al., 2016).

Comparison of SSTP and PCTP (Primary Care Triple P)

A RCT-study, which had the purpose to compare Primary Care Triple P (PCTP) with the usual effort to parents of children with light psychosocial problems showed no significant differences between SSTP and the usual effort to parents. The results must be interpreted with caution, since the study did not get as many participants as planned (Spijkers et al. 2013).

Sources

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Economy

VIVE – In 2018 The National Research- and Analysis Center for Welfare has conducted a cost assessment of testing of SSTP by five Danish municipalities, Stepping Stones Triple P.

Implementation of SSTP is connected to expenses for education of professionals, who can maintain the courses. Likewise, there are costs associated with running the courses both in relation to employee hours, materials, room etc. (VIVE, 2018).

The analysis, which has been conducted by VIVE in 2018, shows that establishment costs and the education of SSTP-practitioners in the method for four employees on average is 325,000 DKK per municipality, while the operating costs vary between 1,344 DKK and 10,328 DKK depending on modules (VIVE, 2018).

Read more about the cost assessment of SSTP on the website of VIVE ([pdf](#))

Sources

VIVE (2018). *Mastery among parents to children with disability: Evaluation of effect, economy and implementation of the mastery program*. CpH.: VIVE.

Published: August 25, 2015. Last updated February 26, 2020

The knowledge that is described in this article is chosen in accordance with criteria of the knowledge portal.