



---

1-6-2020

## The Experiences of Parents and Facilitators in a Positive Parenting Program

Lauren Stenason

*University of Ottawa*, [lsten096@uottawa.ca](mailto:lsten096@uottawa.ca)

Jessie Moorman

*University of Ottawa*, [jmoor095@uottawa.ca](mailto:jmoor095@uottawa.ca)

Elisa Romano

*University of Ottawa*, [eromano@uottawa.ca](mailto:eromano@uottawa.ca)

Follow this and additional works at: <https://nsuworks.nova.edu/tqr>



Part of the [Child Psychology Commons](#), and the [Community Psychology Commons](#)

---

### Recommended APA Citation

Stenason, L., Moorman, J., & Romano, E. (2020). The Experiences of Parents and Facilitators in a Positive Parenting Program. *The Qualitative Report*, 25(1), 1-13. Retrieved from <https://nsuworks.nova.edu/tqr/vol25/iss1/1>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the The Qualitative Report at NSUWorks. It has been accepted for inclusion in The Qualitative Report by an authorized administrator of NSUWorks. For more information, please contact [nsuworks@nova.edu](mailto:nsuworks@nova.edu).

---



## The Experiences of Parents and Facilitators in a Positive Parenting Program

### Abstract

The researchers examined facilitators' and parents' experiences with the Positive Discipline in Everyday Parenting (PDEP) program through qualitative methodology. PDEP is a primary prevention program that teaches parents to move away from physical punishment and toward conflict resolution and positive parenting that focuses on stages of child development. Using a phenomenological approach, we conducted focus groups using semi-structured interviews with four PDEP facilitators and seven parents who completed the program. Parents and facilitators indicated that PDEP helped them learn new ways of thinking about parenting and contributed to overall changes in their parenting approach, including finding a balance of structured and sensitive parenting practices. Factors that contributed to positive experiences included the coherence and continuity among program modules, use of concrete examples to demonstrate concepts, supportive facilitators and fellow group members, and the provision of childcare. Suggestions for program improvement included the use of even more concrete examples to demonstrate parenting concepts, longer program duration, and greater flexibility in program delivery. These findings are important for further adaptations to the PDEP program. These findings may also be generalized to parenting programs that share similar core principles.

### Keywords

Parenting, Intervention, Evaluation, Qualitative, Positive Discipline

### Creative Commons License



This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution-Noncommercial-Share Alike 4.0 License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/4.0/).

### Acknowledgements

This work was supported through a contract with a local community agency that received Ontario Trillium Funding to implement the PDEP program and gather outcome data.

## The Experiences of Parents and Facilitators in a Positive Parenting Program

Lauren Stenason, Jessie Moorman, and Elisa Romano  
University of Ottawa, Ontario, Canada

---

*The researchers examined facilitators' and parents' experiences with the Positive Discipline in Everyday Parenting (PDEP) program through qualitative methodology. PDEP is a primary prevention program that teaches parents to move away from physical punishment and toward conflict resolution and positive parenting that focuses on stages of child development. Using a phenomenological approach, we conducted focus groups using semi-structured interviews with four PDEP facilitators and seven parents who completed the program. Parents and facilitators indicated that PDEP helped them learn new ways of thinking about parenting and contributed to overall changes in their parenting approach, including finding a balance of structured and sensitive parenting practices. Factors that contributed to positive experiences included the coherence and continuity among program modules, use of concrete examples to demonstrate concepts, supportive facilitators and fellow group members, and the provision of childcare. Suggestions for program improvement included the use of even more concrete examples to demonstrate parenting concepts, longer program duration, and greater flexibility in program delivery. These findings are important for further adaptations to the PDEP program. These findings may also be generalized to parenting programs that share similar core principles. Keywords: Parenting, Intervention, Evaluation, Qualitative, Positive Discipline*

---

Children's relationships with their parents undoubtedly influence their development by impacting domains such as social functioning, school achievement, and mental health (Chamberlain & Patterson, 1995; El Nokali, Bachman, & Votruba-Drzal, 2010; Fan & Chen, 2001; Rimm-Kaufman, Pianta, Cox, & Bradley, 2003; Sanders & Dunan, 1995; Supplee, Shaw, Hailstones, & Hartman, 2004). Positive parent-child relationships allow children to flourish, often acting as a buffer against adversity and helping to build resilience in children (Chamberlain & Patterson, 1995; Kiff, Lengua, & Zalewski, 2011; Masten, 2001). Studies have shown that children whose parents express warmth, support, and positive emotions are more likely to have higher self-esteem and empathy as well as fewer behavioral problems (Cox & Harter, 2003; Eisenberg et al., 2005; Han, Rudy, & Proulx, 2017; Zubizarreta, Calvete, & Hankin, 2019). While positive parent-child relationships contribute to a child's well-being, problems in family functioning and strained parent-child relationships may negatively impact a child's healthy development (Zubizarreta et al., 2019). For example, parental negativity has been associated with increased child delinquency, greater non-compliant behavior, and poorer peer relationships (Deater-Deckard et al., 2001; Hosokawa & Katsura, 2018).

One parenting behavior that often is considered detrimental to the parent-child relationship and to children's healthy development is physical punishment (Committee on the Rights of the Child, 2006). Physical punishment consists of physical force purposefully causing some degree pain (e.g., spanking, slapping, hitting with an object; United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child, 2006). In Canada, parents are permitted to use "reasonable" physical

force for child disciplinary purposes, as indicated in Section 43 of the Canadian Criminal Code (Criminal Code, 2011). In a recent study with a nationally-representative sample of Canadian parents, 25% of parents reported using physical punishment with their child aged 2 to 11 years (Fréchette & Romano, 2015).

The most common form of physical punishment is spanking, which involves using an open hand to hit a child on the buttocks or extremities (McLoyd & Smith, 2002). A recent meta-analysis that included 75 studies on spanking (Gershoff & Grogan-Kaylor, 2016) found that among the 79 significant effect sizes, 99% demonstrated a statistically significant association between spanking and such negative child outcomes as antisocial behavior, externalizing and internalizing problems, negative parent-child relationships, low self-esteem, and risk of physical abuse by parents. In addition, adults who reported childhood experiences of spanking were more likely to report mental health problems, antisocial behavior, and positive attitudes towards spanking. Afifi et al. (2017) also found that childhood spanking increased the odds of suicide attempts, moderate to heavy drinking, and street drug use, even after taking into account any childhood experiences of maltreatment in the form of physical and/or emotional abuse.

Research linking spanking (and physical punishment more generally) with a number of detrimental child outcomes has led to organizations worldwide calling for the use of alternative, positive disciplinary strategies. Efforts to eliminate the use of physical punishment are also based on the recognition that it is a violation of children's rights. In 1989, the United Nations established the Convention on the Rights of the Child to recognize and uphold children's human rights to physical integrity and dignity, with the goal of eliminating violence against children (Committee on the Rights of the Child, 2006). The Convention was ratified by Canada in 1991 as an indication that it would uphold the tenets outlined in the Convention. Currently, 53 countries have prohibited the use of physical punishment, although it should be noted that Canada is not among those countries (Global Initiative to End All Corporal Punishment of Children, 2018). Given these global initiatives to eliminate physical punishment as well as research findings indicating its negative impacts on child well-being, a number of parenting programs have been developed that focus on alternative and positive methods of discipline.

### **Positive Discipline in Everyday Parenting**

Given the literature highlighting the negative impact of physical punishment on children's well-being, a number of interventions have been designed to teach parents positive parenting skills. Although the specific components of each intervention differ, many share similar components. Specifically, positive parenting programs focus on treating children kindly while at the same time providing them with structure, finding the root causes of children's behaviors, and promoting positive parent-child interactions (Carroll & Hamilton, 2016). These programs avoid the use of punishment with the aim of fostering strong attachments between parents and children.

In the current study, we focused on the Positive Discipline in Everyday Parenting (PDEP) program, developed in 2006 by Dr. Joan Durrant in partnership with Save the Children. PDEP is a primary prevention program that teaches parents of children aged newborn to 18 years to move away from physical punishment and towards conflict resolution and positive parenting (Durrant, 2016; Durrant et al., 2014). The program is available in 16 different languages and is being implemented in over 25 countries by trained facilitators (Durrant et al., 2014). PDEP consists of four modules delivered over eight 90-minute sessions in a group setting. The four modules include: a) focusing on long-term goals; b) providing warmth and structure; c) understanding how children think and feel; and d) problem solving.

The PDEP program is based on the theory of planned behavior (Ajzen, 2002), which targets core cognitive and affective predictors of physical punishment that include the approval of physical punishment, attributions for children's behavior, and anger (Ateah & Durrant, 2005). This theory is guided by three principles that lead to a behavioral intention, namely behavior beliefs, normative beliefs, and control beliefs. *Behavioral beliefs* refer to the consequences and attitudes toward a particular behavior. In the context of physical punishment, if parents have positive attitudes toward physical punishment, their intention to perform that behavior increases (Durrant et al., 2014). The PDEP program aims to reduce parental approval of physical punishment by teaching parents about the risks of physical punishment and the benefits of improved communication and attachment (Durrant, 2016; Durrant et al., 2014). *Normative beliefs* take into account the expectations of other people. For example, if it is a common belief that good parents sometimes spank their children as a form of discipline, there may be pressure to engage in physical punishment (Durrant, 2016; Durrant et al., 2014). PDEP attempts to normalize parent-child conflict and increase parents' understanding of the differences between typical child development versus challenging behavior (Durrant, 2016; Durrant et al., 2014). Finally, *control beliefs* refer to the factors that may improve or impede the performance of a behavior. To address these beliefs, PDEP provides parents with the knowledge and skills needed to strengthen non-violent conflict resolution (Durrant et al., 2014).

Despite its widespread use, there has been only one evaluation of the PDEP program to date. In this evaluation (Durrant et al., 2014), results indicated that parents who completed PDEP were less supportive of physical punishment, less likely to attribute their child's behaviors to defiance, and more likely to experience self-efficacy in their parenting role, based on self-report measures. Furthermore, 95% of parents indicated that PDEP helped to reduce their approval of physical punishment, and 80% believed the program would help decrease their use of physical punishment. Despite these promising quantitative findings, there has yet to be a qualitative evaluation of the PDEP program.

## **Purpose of Study**

We conducted a formative qualitative evaluation of PDEP, which is an approach that focuses on improving an intervention by examining its strengths and weaknesses (Patton, 2015). We employed Fereday and Muir-Cochrane's (2006) social phenomenological perspective to explore the subjective experiences of parents and facilitators who engaged in a four-module parenting program to reduce physical punishment. In line with the principles of formative evaluation (Patton, 2015), our interest was in examining the perceived utility of PDEP's content across the modules, group delivery methods, and facilitation from both a consumer (i.e., parent) and organizational (i.e., facilitator) perspectives. This approach focuses on learning of the program's strengths, weaknesses, and areas for improvement that occur in a specific setting (Patton, 2015). We carried out the evaluation in a community-based organization in a large urban city in the province of Ontario (Canada) by way of semi-structured focus groups with both parents who completed PDEP as well as facilitators who delivered the program.

## **Role of the Researchers**

The research team consisted of three co-investigators. The first and second authors are doctoral psychology students who assisted in developing the focus group interview questions and in conducting the focus groups, analyzing the data, and writing the manuscript. The third author is a psychology professor who helped develop the focus group interview questions, supervised the study, and helped with the manuscript writing.

Collectively, we developed an interest in the PDEP program due to its emphasis on children's rights and on the use of positive, non-punitive discipline, as well as its promising positive outcomes for families. This project began when members from the community organization involved in the current study approached the third author to collaborate with them to evaluate the PDEP program. Together, the research team worked with the organization's managers to develop an evaluation framework that helped gather perspectives about the program's impact and delivery.

## **Method**

### **Participants**

Through a local community organization, we recruited PDEP facilitators and parents who completed the PDEP program. Four facilitators (one male and three female) participated in a focus group. All facilitators were part of the community organization and had delivered the PDEP program at least once in the past year. Seven parents (one male and six female) participated across two focus groups. All participating parents had completed the PDEP program within the past year. Parents' participation in the PDEP program was through self-referral at the community agency where the program was being offered. Parents who participated had children who ranged in ages and had a number of children per family (ranging from 1-9 children). More specific demographic information was not obtained as part of the evaluation. Participation in the focus group was voluntary, and both parents and facilitators were informed that they could withdraw their participation at any time.

### **Data Collection**

We conducted two semi-structured focus groups (one for parents and one for facilitators) in partnership with the agency's program managers to inquire about overall PDEP experiences, impact, and delivery. Focus groups followed an interview guide approach where topics and interview questions were developed in advance but allowed for varying sequence and wording during the course of the interview (Patton, 2015). The researchers and program managers collaboratively developed the focus group questions for facilitators and parents. We divided the questions into the three following sections to capture both general and specific feedback about PDEP's content and delivery: (1) overall program experience; (2) changes in parenting skills related to each PDEP module (content); and (3) program delivery and suggestions for improvement.

**Facilitator questions.** Questions about the overall program focused on the extent to which facilitators observed an impact on parenting and on the applicability of the program for families (e.g., Overall, was there an impact you observed for the parents? If so, what was it, and, overall, was there an impact you observed in the parent-child relationship and in the family more generally? If so, what was it?).

Turning to the PDEP modules, facilitators responded to questions about what they perceived to be most helpful and most challenging for parents in each of the four modules, namely identifying long term goals, providing warmth and structure, understanding how children think and feel, and problem solving with positive discipline. Finally, facilitators responded to questions about program delivery and suggestions for improvement. Questions included: "What aspects about the delivery model (i.e., having childcare, providing snacks, timing and location of the sessions) made it easier to deliver PDEP?" "How could delivery

aspects be improved?” and “What are some issues that will be important to consider in order to make PDEP sustainable within your agency moving forward?”

**Parent questions.** Questions for parents mirrored those for facilitators. Specifically, they responded to questions on the degree to which having participated in the PDEP program contributed to changes in their overall parenting (i.e., Overall, since completing this parenting program, what has changed for you as a parent?). Parents also elaborated on what they found helpful or not helpful in each of the four modules (e.g., In this module, you learned about how a loving, affectionate relationship is important for your child. You also learned about the importance of establishing trust, respecting communication, and using a “teaching” approach with your child. You also learned specific ways to give structure and warmth to your child. What did you find helpful about this module? Please provide an example.). Finally, parents responded to questions about the program’s delivery (i.e., What were some positive things about being in a group with other parents? What were some challenges?).

## **Procedure**

The study was reviewed and approved by our University’s Office of Research Ethics and Integrity (approval number H08-17-05). Program managers at our collaborating agency approached PDEP facilitators regarding the program’s evaluation and the opportunity to participate in the focus groups. The program managers provided facilitators with information about the purpose of the evaluation and nature of the focus groups for both facilitators and parents. All four facilitators who were approached by program managers agreed to participate, and they agreed to have their contact information made available to researchers for the purpose of scheduling a time to conduct the focus group. Facilitators provided verbal consent to participate in the focus group and to have their responses audio-recorded for the purpose of transcription accuracy. The facilitator focus group was scheduled one evening at the community-based organization and lasted two hours. The first and second authors facilitated the focus group. One facilitator took the lead in presenting the questions, while the other facilitator focused on note-taking. Following the completion of the focus group, facilitators were thanked for their participation and they received a \$40 gift card in appreciation of their time.

To aid with parental recruitment, a PDEP facilitator in the agency approached parents (in person and through email) and provided them with a letter of information outlining the current study objectives. Parents were informed that the purpose of the focus group was to understand their experience with the PDEP program, and that this evaluation would take place in a group format with other parents who completed PDEP. Interested parents provided their contact information to the PDEP facilitator, who then forwarded the information to our research team. Research assistants contacted interested parents to provide additional information about the study and schedule participation in one of two focus groups that were being offered on two separate evenings at the community-based organization. Parents were informed that any level of participation would be welcome and that their responses would remain anonymous. Parents provided written consent to participate in the focus group and to be audiotaped. Parents received a \$40 gift card in appreciation of their time. All focus groups were conducted in spring 2017.

## **Data Analysis**

After the completion of all focus groups, we transcribed participants’ responses in preparation for analysis. Focus group data were examined by way of thematic and cross-

sectional analysis where responses were coded according to specific interview questions (Patton, 2015) that relied on deductive and inductive coding (Fereday & Muir-Cochrane, 2006). A deductive, a priori coding scheme was first created using a list of categories based on the main focus group questions. This scheme included the following categories: overall parenting changes; changes in specific parenting skills for each of the four PDEP modules; program delivery feedback; and suggestions for improvement. Within these a priori categories, we applied an inductive approach for more in-depth analysis to identify emergent sub-categories. We also examined the focus group transcripts for possible additional categories beyond those that we developed a priori (Fereday & Muir-Cochrane, 2006). All sub-categories were reviewed and reworked until authors arrived at a consistent set of sub-categories to identify meaningful units of text. This coding scheme was applied to both sets of transcripts, namely those of parents and those of PDEP facilitators. We then created frequencies for each sub-category to organize patterns found in the data (Fereday & Muir-Cochrane, 2006). This combination of deductive and inductive coding complemented both the research questions and focus group template while allowing additional categories and sub-categories to emerge that extended beyond the a priori coding scheme (Fereday & Muir-Cochrane, 2006). The first two study authors completed all coding procedures.

## Results

### Overall Parenting Changes

When asked about whether the PDEP program contributed to overall changes in their parenting approach, five parents identified that the program helped them find **balance in their parenting practices** (e.g., balancing short- and long-term goals, providing structure and warmth simultaneously). Parents also cited that the program helped them become more curious by trying to identify the **underlying reasons for their child's behavior** ( $n = 3$ ). One parent commented: "Instead of me constantly getting frustrated, now it's like okay, why are you doing that?" Three parents and two facilitators reported that the program helped parents to **reflect on their own parenting experiences** when they were growing up and make any changes in order to benefit their children. One parent commented: "I'm looking at how I discipline my child. I have to stop and evaluate. The way of thinking of our parents and grandparents was to give spankings. And now, I think, I can't do that." Finally, two facilitators noted that parents seemed to have benefited from increased **self-efficacy** in their parenting skills. One facilitator commented:

I can see the impact when the parent is more relaxed and feels like they are more equipped to deal with situations, and also when they're able to not worry so much about what people are thinking of them while they are dealing with the situation. So, the parents are more relaxed, I noticed that the children were more relaxed.

### Changes in Specific Parenting Skills

**Module 1: Identifying long-term goals.** Two parents noted that this module helped them find a **balance** between their short- and long-term parenting goals. One parent commented:



The long-term goal was a huge eye-opener for me, I'm thinking more down the line. Ok, when my daughter is 16, do I want her to run away, into drugs or alcohol? So, the fact that they spoke about long-term goals was super important to me, that was brand new in my way of thinking.

Three facilitators also recognized the **importance of parents identifying long-term parenting goals**. One facilitator commented:

I was actually thinking long-term goals was something to me that was one of the most useful [for parents], as much as it was very important [to focus on] warmth and structure, it was like when a parent always thinks about warmth and structure - it's always on your mind, you know that when a parent has to stop and think what kind of child do I want - What's my long-term goal? How do I get there?

**Module 2: Providing warmth and structure.** For several parents (n = 2), providing warmth and structure represented a **new parenting approach** that they believed would benefit all children. One parent commented: "Something that was new for me was warmth and structure... they gave me specific words to describe a method. It was very clear." Parents commented on learning that both warmth and structure could be incorporated into their parenting practices and that **warmth and structure were not mutually exclusive** (i.e., providing structure does not mean a parent is not warm, and vice versa). Similarly, two facilitators commented that parents appreciated understanding how warmth and structure could be used together. One facilitator commented:

The structure can be warm. I find [that] some parents are going to say, I'm more this, I'm more that... the definition of each is wider than what we think is warmth and structure... It [PDEP] permits you to see or to undo this cognition you have about what is warmth and what is discipline or structure.

**Module 3: Understanding how children think and feel.** All facilitator comments on this module focused on suggested improvements. As such, responses were included in the section below. Four parents identified that this module helped them **tailor expectations** based on their child's developmental stage. Learning that certain behaviors are typical based on a child's developmental stage helped parents set age-appropriate expectations for their children. For example, instead of perceiving a behavior as "negative" and then responding in a harsh disciplinary way, parents reported being able to re-evaluate the situation and consider whether this behavior was a normative part of the child's developmental stage. One parent commented:

... they're all different because ... between one and three it's potty training. That's what it is. It's potty training and then I guess my daughter now, who is 19 months old, it's her eating habits. And yes, you know, it's okay if she has chocolate pudding all over her, she's like 1, she's not 11. You have to cater it to all the different stages.

**Module 4: Problem solving.** Two parents elaborated on the benefits of working through **real-life examples** throughout this module. One parent commented: "They mentioned in this program pretending to blow bubbles to control your emotions and the children learned this as well. It was a real-life example and skill on how to calm the situation immediately." One facilitator also commented that parents responded well to working through concrete

examples and the various steps that are part of a problem-solving approach to parenting. This facilitator noted:

A lot of the parents, when they come to the program, are those parents looking for that quick fix. So, they're kind of looking... I have this problem ... just give me what to do. And I think that when [we] go through the problem solving, we go through steps.

### Program Delivery

It should be noted that only parents responded to questions about the PDEP facilitators, the agency, and the program's group format.

**Facilitators and agency.** When asked about their experiences with PDEP facilitators and the agency, most parents (n = 4) commented on the **sense of community** that was established. Two parents commented that they would return to the agency for future programming, and three also expressed an interest in remaining connected to potential PDEP follow-up or drop-in groups with the agency. One parent commented:

One of the things I like is the fact that they are social workers in our community and that we can call upon if we really needed to. And the fact that they are the ones that gave the course, they know what we're talking about. If we ever bring up something like, I like that part, I like the fact that you know you can go back to them, and I would.

In a similar vein, three parents spoke about the supportive nature of the **parent-facilitator relationship**. Parents elaborated on the supportive stance and availability of the facilitators not only as part of the PDEP program but also outside of the group context.

**Group format.** When asked about their experiences working with the program's group format, emerging themes centered on the ability to **work together** in a warm format and with a sense of connection. Two parents noted that the group format fostered an ability to work together on parenting challenges. One parent commented: "We would brainstorm something in small groups and then we would open up and share, you know what I mean. They made it a warm environment." Two additional parents also highlighted the connectedness and support that the group structure offered. One parent commented: "Being in a group was also kind of empowering because it was like, oh yeah, this parent is giggling over here because they have the same situation."

**Organization.** When asked about aspects related to how the community agency organized the PDEP program (e.g., presence of childcare and snacks, time and location of meetings), three parents expressed appreciation for the availability of **childcare** services during the meetings. One parent commented: "Knowing that there were trustworthy caregivers here to help look after the children made it possible for me to attend." Two parents also commented that the **provision of snacks** represented a considerate and caring gesture on the part of the agency.

## Suggestions for Improvement

Parents mentioned several areas of improvement with regard to two specific PDEP modules, namely the module on understanding how children think and feel and the module on problem solving. For understanding how children think and feel, two parents would have appreciated **more hands-on, concrete examples** to help illustrate the parenting concepts. Three facilitators also indicated that it was **challenging to engage all parents** during each developmental stage. One facilitator commented:

One of the things that when we were going over like the early years and you have parents who are no longer there. They find that very long sitting there. They want to know, "What am I doing? What do I have to do now?" ... and you can see [it's] almost like they're getting restless or whatever. Because they know that their child is 14 and we're still at the age of like 2.

Three parents and three facilitators indicated that both the module on understanding how children think and feel and the module on problem solving included a **large amount of material** to cover in a short period of time. Four parents suggested that more time be spent working through problem-solving examples, as they found it to be a valuable learning opportunity but not all of the examples could be addressed.

With regard to program delivery, three parents suggested that there be a **longer program duration** due to the large amount of material to cover. Two facilitators had a similar suggestion, with one commenting:

One of the things I thought was challenging was some weeks were fairly ... the timing was pretty good for being able to go over the PowerPoints and having group discussion and then there were other weeks where the content of the course was so long, like a lot of material to cover and no chance for group discussion and it's almost like you have to go, go, go!

One facilitator also would have liked **greater flexibility in the delivery** of the program based on the needs of parents attending the sessions. For example, if all parents have children of older ages, facilitators suggested tailoring the module on understanding how children think and feel to focus more time on the developmental stages for older children.

In terms of suggestions for logistical improvements, three parents noted that the **timing** of the group made attendance challenging, and they suggested that a group be offered both during the day and in the evening to best accommodate parents who may or may not be employed outside the home. Two parents also reported challenges with the **group's location**, as it pertained to accessibility (i.e., not having an elevator or ramps) and delays in arriving to group on time during heavy traffic periods.

## Discussion

Given the detrimental impact of physical punishment on children's well-being, it is crucial to provide parents with the knowledge and skills necessary to promote positive parent-child relationships and foster strong attachments. PDEP is one such positive parenting program that teaches such skills as providing warmth and structure, identifying long term goals, understanding how children think and feel, and problem solving. The current qualitative findings, in combination with Durrant et al.'s (2014) evaluation, suggest that families found the program achieved its goals of promoting positive discipline.

The current study interviewed four facilitators and seven parents involved with the PDEP program. Both groups of individuals reported positive changes in parents' approach to caregiving and an improved sense of parenting efficacy. In terms of PDEP's content, facilitators noted that the module on identifying long-term parenting goals helped parents identify both short-term and long-term goals for their child as well as ways in which their parenting behaviors moved them closer to or further away from these goals. In the module on providing warmth and structure, parents commented that this was a new and exciting parenting approach. Facilitators also commented that parents seemed to really benefit from the material in this module. Many parents noted that they had not previously considered how warmth and structure could be used simultaneously when interacting with their children. They commented on learning to incorporate structure in their daily parenting practices (e.g., creating a specific morning routine) but also allowing for flexibility when considering their child's preferences (e.g., making time for activities the child requests). In the module on understanding how children think and feel, parents reported benefitting from understanding how children's developmental stage can often explain their behavior and how to tailor their parenting approach based on these developmental considerations. Finally, parents highlighted the utility of working through real-life, concrete examples of parenting challenges in the module on problem solving. Facilitators also agreed that parents responded well to working through concrete examples and the various steps that are a part of a problem-solving approach to parenting.

Although both parents and facilitators elaborated on many positive aspects of the PDEP program, they did have several suggestions for improvement. Parents noted wanting to work through more concrete, hands-on examples to demonstrate the concepts presented, most notably on challenging situations such as dealing with "tantrums." Both parents and facilitators suggested that the program be of longer duration, due to the large amount of material to cover. Facilitators found it challenging to engage all parents during each developmental stage throughout the module on understanding how children think and feel, and they suggested greater flexibility in the delivery of the program depending on the group's parenting demographics and needs.

In terms of content, parents gained knowledge and skills with regard to thinking about their long-term parenting goals, providing both warmth and structure to their children, understanding the different stages of child development and how this impacts children's behavior, and problem solving around challenging parent-child interactions. Parents appreciated the use of concrete, hands-on examples to complement their learning and benefitted from the provision of childcare when the group occurred. One suggestion for improvement mentioned by both facilitators and parents that is applicable to many group-based interventions was that there was a large amount of content to cover during a limited period of time. Consequently, programs should aim to find balance between the amount of content and program length as to not overwhelm group attendees and facilitators.

## **Limitations**

Limitations of our study surround data analysis. The analysis was conducted by two doctoral students and then discussed with a research supervisor. Although this process allowed for consistency in the method, it was limited in providing multiple perspectives from a variety of participants with differing expertise. Specifically, the coding of data could involve several stakeholders, with themes developed in discussion with other researchers, agency program managers, and/or the participants themselves. Investigator triangulation (i.e., including several stakeholders in the analysis) is one form of triangulation, which increases the credibility of the results (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). However, the current study did include several perspectives (i.e., parents and facilitators), which would be important to continue in future studies to provide

opportunities to examine the similarities and differences in the perspectives of individuals involved in the PDEP program.

Additionally, not all parents or facilitators expressed their perspectives in the focus group and as a result, not all of the perspectives were heard. This may be explained by some individuals finding it difficult to speak in a group format, especially to share perspectives that differed from the group. Future studies may consider the use of individual interviews to mitigate some participants' apprehension about speaking in a group format.

## Conclusion

This study highlights the importance of including both parent and facilitator perspectives in the evaluation of a community-based parenting program. Findings provide rich information on perceived program impacts and may help guide decisions from community-based agencies over whether and how to implement the PDEP program. These findings will also inform further development of the PDEP program by contributing to its evaluation. Finally, findings may also apply to other parenting programs teaching similar content and may inform aspects of program delivery. Future research may consider using a larger and more representative sample of participants from multiple agencies, incorporating individual interviews, and continuing to gather perspectives from multiple stakeholders involved in the PDEP program. Both qualitative and quantitative approaches to evaluation should be continued as a way to build the evidence base for the PDEP program.

## References

- Afifi, T. O., Ford, D., Gershoff, E. T., Merrick, M., Grogan-Kaylor, A., Ports, K. A., ... Bennett, R. P. (2017). Spanking and adult mental health impairment: The case for the designation of spanking as an adverse childhood experience. *Child Abuse & Neglect*, *71*, 24-31. doi:10.1016/j.chiabu.2017.01.014
- Ajzen, I. (2002). Perceived behavioral control, self-efficacy, locus of control, and the theory of planned behavior. *Journal of Applied Social Psychology*, *32*, 665-683. doi:10.1111/j.1559-1816.2002.tb00236.x
- Ateah, C. A., & Durrant, J. E. (2005). Maternal use of physical punishment in response to child misbehavior: Implications for child abuse prevention. *Child Abuse & Neglect*, *29*, 169-185. doi:10.1016/j.chiabu.2004.10.010
- Carroll, P., & Hamilton, W. K. (2016). Positive discipline parenting scale: Reliability and validity of a measure. *The Journal of Individual Psychology*, *72*, 60-74. doi:10.1353/jip.2016.0002
- Chamberlain, P., & Patterson, G. R. (1995). Discipline and child compliance in parenting. *Handbook of Parenting*, *4*, 205-225.
- Committee on the Rights of the Child. (2006). *Convention on the rights of the child. General comment no. 8*. Geneva, Switzerland: United Nations.
- Cox, M. J., & Harter, K. S. M. (2003). Parent-child relationships. In M. H. Bornstein, L. Davidson, C. L. M. Keyes, & K. A. Moore (Eds.), *Crosscurrents in contemporary psychology. Well-being: Positive development across the life course* (pp. 191-204). Mahwah, NJ, US: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates Publishers.
- Criminal Code, R.S., c. C-34, s.1 (2011). Retrieved from <http://laws-lois.justice.gc.ca>.
- Deater-Deckard, K., Pike, A., Petrill, S. A., Cutting, A. L., Hughes, C., & O'Connor, T. G. (2001). Nonshared environmental processes in social-emotional development: An observational study of identical twin differences in the preschool period. *Developmental Science*, *4*(2), F1-F6. <https://doi->

- [org.proxy.bib.uottawa.ca/10.1111/1467-7687.00157](http://org.proxy.bib.uottawa.ca/10.1111/1467-7687.00157)
- Durrant, J. E. (2016). *Positive discipline in everyday parenting* (4<sup>th</sup> ed.). Stockholm, Sweden: Save the Children.
- Durrant, J. E., Plateau, D. P., Ateah, C., Stewart-Tufescu, A., Jones, A., Ly, G., ... Peters, R. D. (2014). Preventing punitive violence: Preliminary data on the Positive Discipline in Everyday Parenting (PDEP) program. *Canadian Journal of Community Mental Health, 33*, 109-125. <https://doi.org/10.7870/cjcmh-2014-018>
- Eisenberg, N., Zhou, Q., Spinrad, T. L., Valiente, C., Fabes, R. A., & Liew, J. (2005). Relations among positive parenting, children's effortful control, and externalizing problems: A three-wave longitudinal study. *Child Development, 76*, 1055-1071. doi: 10.1111/j.1467-8624.2005.00897.x
- El Nokali, N. E., Bachman, H. J., & Votruba-Drzal, E. (2010). Parent involvement and children's academic and social development in elementary school. *Child Development, 81*, 988-1005. doi: 10.1111/j.1467-8624.2010.01447.x
- Fan, X., & Chen, M. (2001). Parental involvement and students' academic achievement: A meta-analysis. *Educational Psychology Review, 13*, 1-22. <https://doi.org/10.1023/A:1009048817385>
- Fereday, J., & Muir-Cochrane, E. (2006). Demonstrating rigor using thematic analysis: A hybrid approach of inductive and deductive coding and theme development. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods, 5*, 80-92. <https://doi.org/10.1177/160940690600500107>
- Fréchette, S., & Romano, E. (2015). Change in corporal punishment over time in a representative sample of Canadian parents. *Journal of Family Psychology, 29*, 507. doi: 10.1037/fam0000104
- Gershoff, E. T., & Grogan-Kaylor, A. (2016). Spanking and child outcomes: Old controversies and new meta-analyses. *Journal of Family Psychology, 30*, 453. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1037/fam0000191>
- Global Initiative to End All Corporal Punishment of Children (2018). Ending legalised violence against children. Retrieved from: <https://endcorporalpunishment.org/countdown/>
- Han, Y., Rudy, D., & Proulx, C. M. (2017). Longitudinal relationships among marital conflict, maternal and paternal warmth and control, and preschoolers' socioemotional outcomes in South Korea. *Journal of Cross-Cultural Psychology, 48*(10), 1522-1536. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0022022117732300>
- Hosokawa, R., & Katsura, T. (2018). Role of parenting style in children's behavioral problems through the transition from preschool to elementary school according to gender in Japan. *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health, 16*(1), 1-17.
- Kiff, C. J., Lengua, L. J., & Zalewski, M. (2011). Nature and nurturing: Parenting in the context of child temperament. *Clinical Child and Family Psychology Review, 14*(3), 251. doi: 10.1007/s10567-011-0093-4
- Lincoln, Y. S., & Guba, E. G. (1985). *Naturalistic inquiry*. Beverly Hills, CA: Sage Publications.
- Masten, A. S. (2001). Ordinary magic: Resilience processes in development. *American Psychologist, 56*(3), 227. doi: 10.1037/0003-066X.56.3.227
- McLoyd, V. C., & Smith, J. (2002). Physical discipline and behavior problems in African American, European American, and Hispanic children: Emotional support as a moderator. *Journal of Marriage and Family, 64*, 40-53. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1111/j.1741-3737.2002.00040.x>
- Patton, M. Q. (2015). *Qualitative research & evaluation methods: Integrating theory and practice*. Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications, Inc.

- Rimm-Kaufman, S. E., Pianta, R. C., Cox, M. J., & Bradley, R. H. (2003). Teacher-rated family involvement and children's social and academic outcomes in kindergarten. *Early Education and Development, 14*, 179–198. [https://doi.org/10.1207/s15566935eed1402\\_3](https://doi.org/10.1207/s15566935eed1402_3)
- Sanders, M. R., & Duncan, S. B. (1995). Empowering families: Policy, training, and research issues in promoting family mental health in Australia. *Behaviour Change, 12*, 109-121. 10.1017/S0813483900004289
- Supplee, L.H., Shaw, D., Hailstones, K., & Hartman, K. (2004). Family and child influences on early academic and emotion regulatory behaviors. *Journal of School Psychology, 42*, 221–242. doi: 10.1016/j.jsp.2004.02.001
- Zubizarreta, A., Calvete, E., & Hankin, B. L. (2019). Punitive parenting style and psychological problems in childhood: The moderating role of warmth and temperament. *Journal of Child and Family Studies, 28*(1), 233-244. doi: 10.1007/s10826-018-1258-2

### Author Note

Lauren Stenason is a doctoral student in clinical psychology and part of the Children's Wellbeing Laboratory at the University of Ottawa. Correspondence regarding this article can be addressed directly to: [lsten096@uottawa.ca](mailto:lsten096@uottawa.ca).

Jessie Moorman is also a doctoral student in clinical psychology and part of the Children's Wellbeing Laboratory at the University of Ottawa. Correspondence regarding this article can also be addressed directly to: [jmoor095@uottawa.ca](mailto:jmoor095@uottawa.ca).

Dr. Elisa Romano, is the research supervisor and director of the Children's Wellbeing Laboratory at the University of Ottawa. She received her Ph.D. in clinical psychology from the University of Manitoba and is currently a full professor at the University of Ottawa. Her research interests focus on promoting the mental health and wellbeing of children and youth for those who have experienced child maltreatment and family violence. Correspondence regarding this article can also be addressed directly to: [eromano@uottawa.ca](mailto:eromano@uottawa.ca).

Acknowledgement: This work was supported through a contract with a local community agency that received Ontario Trillium Funding to implement the PDEP program and gather outcome data.

Copyright 2020: Lauren Stenason, Jessie Moorman, Elisa Romano, and Nova Southeastern University.

### Article Citation

Stenason, L., Moorman, J., & Romano, E. (2020). The experiences of parents and facilitators in a positive parenting program. *The Qualitative Report, 25*(1), 1-13. <https://nsuworks.nova.edu/tqr/vol25/iss1/1>

---