A New Educational Model to Train Parents for a Successful Upbringing of Children: a European Cross-National Study

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Abstract

The quality of parenting skills is fundamental to the children’s well-being. The project “BE Supportive, NOT violent! Positive parenting for happy children!”, funded by the European Commission, proposes a new model of positive parenting to provide and reinforce parents’ knowledge, resources and tools to achieve a positive relationship and communication with their children. The model has been implemented twice with parents from Romania, Spain, Latvia, Poland, Italy and Sweden with positive results.

Keywords: Parenting Skills, Positive Parenting, Training, Upbringing.

1. Introduction

Childhood is a key period to the future development of a person. At this stage, children acquire social and cognitive skills and abilities that will determine their future. The family environment, in particular parents’ attitude, plays a key role in this growth phase as it is during the early years of life (up to ± 14 years) when children obtain their skills, values, behaviors and basic personality, conditioning their welfare and their future adult life (Ato Lozano et al., 2004).

During childhood, school and family exert the greatest influence on the development and socialization of the person. Teachers have extensive formal training on behavior patterns that they must track when educate and respond to the challenges children face. For parents, this knowledge is informal, based on their own experiences, but its consequences on psychological well-being and personality of the child are not identified accurately. Parents teach their children based on what they have lived, or what they consider are the best patterns for their
education and development. But sometimes they do not have enough tools to know if the way they are acting is the most adequate.

Punishment is a common educational method taught in our societies. Its main aim is to correct and change some behaviors of a person with the objective of modifying a behavior considered to be inadequate. It is used to advise, prevent and teach. Punishment is applied if the standards or established moral behavior is breached, but usually parents do not know how far they have to come up with this corrective measure to be a positive measure in infant development, as well as effective in short and long term. According to the 2006 World Report on Violence against Children (Pinheiro, 2006), it is revealed that millions of children worldwide are physically maltreated or abused in different contexts (family, schools, etc.). Physical punishment of children is culturally seen as a good method to discipline as children learn from physical pain. The previous report recommends the elimination of all corporal punishment of children and the promotion of non-violent, positive discipline.

There are programmes addressed to train parents in parenting skills, as the PECES/STEP programme (Bartau et al., 2001), which aim is to promote that parents acquire and carry out positive skills and abilities to avoid inappropriate behaviour of their children. In Spain, another program – funded by the Ministry of Health and Social Policy and the Spanish Federation of Municipalities and Provinces (Rodrigo López et al., 2010) is focused on the benefits of positive parenting on children, emphasizing the importance of supporting families with children and adolescents and guide them by highlighting the need of strengthening local policies of support.

In the present paper we present research carried out through the project “Be Supportive, Not violent! Positive parenting for happy children!” funded by the III Daphne Programme of the European Commission. In this project participate six European countries participated – Romania, Spain, Latvia, Poland, Italy and Sweden – with an aim of raising awareness about negative effects of corporal and verbal punishment of children, as well as promoting positive and non-violent education in any environment, whether being institutional or not. This project, has developed a new educational model that promotes parental training focused on a positive, non-violent education, based on managing stress and anger, and in the recognition and strengthening of attitudes, achievements and skills of children.

Hence, the aim of this paper is to present the experience and main results obtained after the implementation of this new model of positive parenting twice in the six participating countries.

2. Methodology

The model has been tested twice through the organization of several workshops with parents of 6-14 years old children in Romania, Spain, Latvia, Poland, Italy and Sweden. In each country, 5-6 workshops were held once a week with the following content:

- Children’s social competence development.
- Children’s emotional development.
- Children’s self-esteem development.
- Positive discipline.
- Studying and related issues.

The structure of the session consisted in providing to parents informative background – theoretical introduction, information about latest researches regarding the topic – as well as practical tips and recommendation for daily use in their family environment.

The first implementation was carried out in the period November 2011-January 2012, with a sample of 70 parents; and the second period April 2012-June 2012, with 90 participants. After each session and workshop, all participants filled in a questionnaire to assess their impressions and opinions to improve content and organization of the workshops.
3. Results

During the workshops parents actively participate in the proposed activities of self-evaluating individual tasks, group works or discussions.

The main results obtained from evaluation forms filled in by participants are as follows:
- Most of them felt hope, satisfied and calm after their participation in the workshops.
- Most of them acquired useful techniques about the upbringing of children and learnt more about development of children.
- They started to perceive positive behaviour of their children more often and became more aware of their own feelings.
- They noticed positive changes in their relations with children.

The parents expressed that they liked the following aspects of their participation in the workshops: the opportunity to practice good communication, the strategy of how to set limits, discussions between parents and trainers, examples and practical exercises, exchanging experiences with other parents in the same situation and competent trainers.

4. Conclusions and recommendations

The main results of this study show that the model of positive parenting tested have positive results as, on the one hand, make parents feel more confident of their competence to upbring children, and results in providing them knowledge and advice to reinforce and improve their relationship with their children.

Nowadays, we can find a high number of this kind of initiatives and programmes addressed specifically to parents with the main objective of providing and reinforcing basic parenting skills and abilities to improve their knowledge and role as parents. In line with the project presented, some of these training programmes are for parents in general with a preventive, educational and informative objective (Sanders et al., 2000). Moreover, there are also other initiatives developed for parents with specific or special needs as: first-time parents, families with problematic children or at risk of social exclusion (Danforth et al., 2006).

The results of the implementation of our model are in accordance with those obtained in studies carried out by other authors, which show that structured parent education programmes can be effective in producing positive changes in the parental perceptions and the children's behavior, and that these changes are maintained over time (Sanders et al., 2000). Moreover, behavioral and cognitive parenting group interventions are effective for improving child conduct problems, parental mental health and parenting skills in the short term (Furlong et al., 2012).

The elaboration of the educational model (available at http://www.besupportive.eu/) carried out by an international team of authors that conform to the consortium of the “Be Supportive, Not violent” project, where each member had a different background, approach and experience in work with families, was a productive and challenging task. The result of the work is a parental training programme that can be implemented in different countries with different features as it is adaptable to the needs of the particular parent group that is being trained. Thus, it is a good tool to empower parents for practising positive parenting and reinforcing their skills for daily use with their children.

In summary, this kind of initiatives are aimed to train parents in positive parenting skills that make it possible for parents to gain and reinforce relevant resources to improve their relationship with their children, and sharing experiences with other parents, as well as to avoid the use of violent methods to raise children at home.
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References


