

P.E.T. Summary of Research

Research Findings Confirming the Benefits of the P.E.T. Model of Parenting

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Gordon Training International Instructors are frequently asked if the outcomes and benefits of Parent Effectiveness Training (P.E.T.) have been proven by research. There are two important facts people should know about research on P.E.T.:

- (1) Gordon Training International is a training, not a research organization. Its courses, however, have been evaluated by over a hundred independent studies.
- (2) Many of these studies were Master's theses or Ph.D. dissertations. Nevertheless, not all of them met the essential criteria for rigorously designed studies even though university faculty members obviously approved these studies.

Reviews of Research of the P.E.T. Course

There have been two extensive reviews of P.E.T. course evaluation studies. The first, by Ronald Levant of Boston University, reviewed 23 different studies. The author concluded that many of the studies had methodological discrepancies. Nevertheless, out of a total of 149 comparisons between P.E.T. and control groups or alternative programs, 32% favored P.E.T., 11% favored the alternative group, and 57% found no significant differences. Levant did find three studies that met the standards of methodological adequacy. In these studies, out of 35 comparisons, 69% favored P.E.T. over the control group, none (0%) favored the control group, and 31% showed no significant differences. Levant concluded that P.E.T. appears to result in positive changes in parent attitudes and behavior and changes in children's self-concept and behavior.

Robert Cedar of Boston University later reviewed 26 of the best designed research studies of P.E.T., using the "meta-analytic technique" of integrating the statistical findings from all the studies.

His findings: (1) The overall positive effect of P.E.T. was significantly greater than the effect of alternative treatments, (2) The greatest measurable effect was on parent attitudes, (3) The effect of P.E.T. on parent behavior was significantly greater than the effect of alternative groups, (4) P.E.T.'s effect on children was greatest for the category of self-esteem, (5) Parents did learn the P.E.T. concepts, (6) P.E.T. parents improved their attitudes, showed greater understanding of children, increased their democratic ideals, showed increased positive regard, empathy, congruence, and respect for their children, (7) P.E.T. children rated their parents as more accepting of their children, (8) The positive effects of P.E.T. last longer than the eight weeks training. In fact, they lasted as long as a 26-week follow-up, (9) P.E.T.'s positive effect on children increased over time, (10) The magnitude of the positive effects of P.E.T. was greatest in those studies that had superior research methodology.

Other Research That Confirms the Benefits of the P.E.T. Parenting Model and Skills

We have found a large number of studies that confirm the positive effects of the principles and skills we teach in P.E.T. Even though the studies did not evaluate directly the impact of our P.E.T. course, they did deal with parenting styles, punishment, confrontation, open communication, parent-child cooperation, and conflict-resolution.

The following research findings were quoted from either the Handbook of Child Psychology, 4th edition, P. Mussen, Ed., Wiley & Sons, 1983 or the Review of Child Development Research, F. Horowitz, Ed., University of Chicago Press, 1975.

Baldwin, A., Kalhoun, J., & Breese, F. Patterns of Parent Behavior. Psychological Monographs, 1945, 58(3).

The most surprising finding from this study had to do with changes in the IQs of the children. Over the years, the IQs of the children with autocratic parents decreased slightly, while those of permissive parents remained almost the same. However, the IQs of the children of the democratic parents increased significantly over the years. The mean increase was over eight IQ points. The investigators concluded, "It would appear that the democratic environment is the most conducive to mental development." The democratic parents surrounded their children with an atmosphere of freedom, emotional rapport, and intellectual stimulation. The children in those families also were given higher ratings by their teachers in originality, planfulness, patience, curiosity, and fancifulness. They held more leadership positions in school and scored higher in emotional adjustment and maturity. In the words of the researchers:

By the time the child from the democratic home has become of school age, his social development has progressed markedly; he is popular and a leader; he is friendly and good natured; he seems emotionally secure, serene, unexcitable; he has had close attachments to his parents and is able to adjust to his teachers.

Children of autocratic parents were low in social interaction with peers and tended to be dominated by their peers during the interactions that did occur. These children also tended to be obedient, and neither quarrelsome nor resistive. They seemed to lack spontaneity, affection, curiosity, and originality.

When parents avoid making themselves the source of authority, but instead draw their children's attention to the realistic constraints imposed on their behavior by the natural environment, we may assume that they are training their children to make internal rather than external attributions. The Baldwin group also found that this pattern of parenting was associated with children's being spontaneous, exploratory, and creative.

Maccoby, E., Martin, J.A. Socialization in the Context of the Family: Parent-child Interaction. Handbook of Child Psychology, 1983, 44, 1-101.

“To summarize what has been presented concerning authoritarian parenting, a number of child characteristics have proved to be correlated with this pattern of parenting. Children of authoritarian parents tend to lack social competence with peers: they tend to withdraw, not to take social initiative, to lack spontaneity. Although they do not behave differently from children of other types of parents on contrived measures of resistance to temptation, on projective tests and parent reports they do show lesser evidence of “conscience” and are more likely to have an external, rather than internal, moral orientation in discussing what is the “right” behavior in situations of moral conflict. In boys, there is evidence that motivation for intellectual performance is low. Several studies link authoritarian parenting with low self-esteem and external locus of control.”

Loeb, R., Horst, L., & Horton, P. Family Interaction Patterns Associated with Self-esteem in Preadolescent Girls and Boys. Merrill-Palmer Quarterly, 1980, 26, 203-217.

Loeb showed that a directive, controlling parenting style was associated with an external, rather than internal, locus of control among fourth- and fifth-grade children. Loeb interprets these results as supporting the hypothesis that high levels of parental authoritarian control will impart to children a sense that they are not trusted to undertake activities independently—that they are not considered competent. Hence a controlling parental style is thought to be a negative factor in the development of self-esteem.

Baumrind, D. Child Care Practices Anteceding Three Patterns of Preschool Behavior. Genetic Psychology Monographs, 1967, 75, 43-88.

Children who rated high in self-control and self-discipline were found to have parents who refrained from punitive punishment, using instead a reasoning approach—that is, messages that told the children the negative effects of their behavior on others, as with the P.E.T. I-Messages.

Parke, R. Effectiveness of Punishment as an Interaction of Intensity, Timing, Agent Nurturance and Cognitive Structuring. Child Development, 1969, 40, 211-235.

“Cognitive messages” (like our P.E.T. I-Messages) were more influential than punishment in preventing children from playing with prohibited toys, even in the absence of the researcher. The effects of I-Messages as a deterrent continued over time, whereas the effects of punishment wore off more quickly.

Coopersmith, S. Antecedents of Self-esteem. San Francisco: W.H. Freeman & Co., 1967.

Mothers whose children had high self-esteem when compared with mothers whose children had low self-esteem were found to use more reasoning and verbal discussion and less arbitrary punitive discipline. This study confirms the benefits of our confrontive I-Messages which inform children of the consequences of their behavior.

Baumrind, D. Current Patterns of Parental Authority. *Developmental Psychology Monograph*, 1971, 4(1, pt. 2).

A pattern of family functioning in which children are required to be responsive to parental demands, and parents accept a reciprocal responsibility to be as responsive as possible to their children's reasonable demands and points of view, has been labeled "authoritative" by Baumrind. P.E.T. uses this term and also the label "reciprocal." In Baumrind's samples, children of authoritative parents have proved to be more competent than the children of either authoritarian or permissive parents. At preschool age, daughters of authoritative parents were as socially responsible as other girls, and more independent. Sons were as independent as other boys, and more socially responsible. It is misleading to use the term "authoritative," because many people have interpreted this as using authority (power).

Comstock, M. Effects of Perceived Parental Behavior on Self-esteem and Adjustment. *Dissertation Abstracts*, 1973, 34, 465B.

The weight of the evidence would appear to be that neither authoritarian control nor unalloyed freedom and permissiveness is the key to the development of high self-esteem in children. Rather, a pattern of interaction in which parents make reasonable and firm demands that are accepted as legitimate by the children, but in which parents do not impose unreasonable restrictions but "make demands and give directions in ways that leave a degree of choice and control in the hands of the children," is the control pattern most likely to foster high self-esteem. Again this supports P.E.T.'s Confrontive I-Messages.

Pulkkinen, L. Self-control and Continuity from Childhood to Adolescence. In P.B. Baltes & O. Brim (Eds), *Life-span development and behavior* (vol. 4). New York: Academic Press, 1982.

It may be seen that high parental involvement was usually embedded in a context of reciprocal or "authoritative" parenting. At the age of 14, children of the child-oriented parents were on the average responsible, achievement oriented, competent in social relationships, and likely to maintain good relationships with their parents. By contrast, the children of parent-centered parents were impulsive (in the sense of lacking concentration, being moody, spending money quickly rather than saving it, and having difficulty controlling aggressive outbursts), uninterested in school, likely to be truant and spend time on the streets and at discos; in addition, their friends were often disliked by the parents. The children of parent-centered families also tended to start drinking, smoking, and heterosexual dating at earlier ages. Continuities to the age of 20 were found: at this age, the children from parent-centered families were more likely than those from child-centered homes to be hedonistic and lack frustration tolerance and emotional control; they also lacked long-term goals, drank to excess, and more often had a record of arrests. The children from child-centered homes were more likely to have strong achievement motives and be oriented toward the future.

Bearlson, D., & Cassel, T. Cognitive Decentration and Social Codes: Communication Effectiveness in Young Children from Differing Family Contexts. *Developmental Psychology*, 1975, 11, 29-36.

Bearlson and Cassel carried out a study that is relevant to the development of moral judgment, though not directly focused on it. They investigated children's ability to take the perspective of another person in a communication game, and related this ability to aspects of child rearing. The mothers were interviewed and asked how they would react to several common disciplinary situations. Their answers were scored

according to whether they were person-oriented or position-oriented. Person-oriented appeals included regulatory statements that drew attention to the feelings, thought, needs or intentions of the mother, the child or a third person who may be affected by the child's action. Position-oriented appeals referred to rules or statuses (e.g., "Eight-thirty is your bedtime," "All children have to go to school"). Children whose mothers were more given to the use of person-oriented arguments, rather than position-oriented ones, were more successful in taking the perspective of another person in a game that required them to do so. Insofar as perspective-taking is instrumental in the development of moral judgment--and Kohlberg, Selman and others have argued that it is--then person-oriented reasoning by parents should foster this development.

At least, repeated parental stress on "the consequences (especially consequences for others) of children's actions" seems to move them toward more mature levels of thought when they are asked to consider moral issues. This also confirms our three-part I-Messages.

Baumrind, D., & Black, A. Socialization Practices Associated with Dimensions of Competence in Preschool Boys and Girls. *Child Development*, 1967, 38, 291-327.

In an early study with a relatively small sample, it was found that a group of children were unhappy and socially withdrawn in nursery school tended to have parents who fit the authoritarian pattern.

Baumrind found that nursery-school children who were rated high on self-control had parents who made extensive use of reasoning in a generally nurturant and nonpunitive atmosphere, rewarded self-controlling behavior, and firmly enforced rules. This pattern includes the cognitive structuring feature of love-oriented discipline but does not necessarily include use of the effective relationship to make the child feel badly. There is also considerable evidence that one form of deviation, antisocial aggression, is associated with power-assertive parental discipline, low warmth, and low use of cognitive structuring.

Maccoby, E., Martin J. Socialization in the Context of the Family: Parent-child Interaction. *Handbook of Child Psychology*, 1983, 45, 1-101.

To summarize our brief review on the correlates of the permissive pattern of parenting, this parenting pattern appears on the whole to have more negative than positive effects, in the sense that it is associated with children's being impulsive, aggressive, and lacking in independence or the ability to take responsibility. This supports the P.E.T. position on permissiveness.

Hetherington, E., Cox, M., & Cox, R. Effects of Divorce on Parents and Children. In M. Lamb (Ed.), *Non-traditional Families*. Hillsdale, N.J.; Erlbaum, 1982.

Parental use of reasoning and explanation were related to longer term positive outcomes: to increasing self-control and prosocial behavior. If these behavioral characteristics can be seen as according with parental desires for their children's behavior, we may interpret these findings as providing an instance in which children's receptive or spontaneous compliance is enhanced by inductive techniques.

Carlsmith, J., Lepper, M., & Landauer, T. Children's Obedience to Adult Requests: Interactive Affects of Anxiety Arousal and Apparent Punitiveness of Adults. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 1974, 30, 822-828.

Parents find that they can obtain immediate compliance by raising their voices and issuing orders rather than requests. However, in so doing they may be reducing their children's readiness to be cooperative on subsequent occasions. Thus if they have used power-assertive methods, they must resort to them more and more frequently as time goes on. Ultimately power-assertive methods may lose their capacity to exact even immediate compliance unless pressures are escalated to very fear-producing levels indeed. The possibility of benign cycles quite clearly also exists. If parents succeed in obtaining compliance with inductive methods and cooperation-based appeals (partly by timing their requests to coincide with moments when they have the child's attention and have induced a positive mood), then the chances for obtaining willing compliance on subsequent occasions should be improved.

Damon, W. *The Social World of the Child*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1977.

Parents who are themselves cooperative with their children's needs tend to have children who are cooperative with theirs; parents who are trustworthy tend to have children who trust them and thus cooperate with them; parents who themselves legitimize their children's needs and desires tend to have children who treat their parents' needs and desires as legitimate, as well. Regarding receptive compliance, then, there is fairly strong and consistent evidence for "reciprocal cooperation in families." That is, a style of cooperation tends to co-occur in parents and children.

Kandel, D., & Lesser, G. *Youth in Two Worlds*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1972.

Youth in both countries (United States and Denmark) reported greater reliance on parents than on peers in developing personal standards for conflict resolution, and the sense of autonomy, i.e. ability to exercise valid independent judgment, was greater among youth whose parents used frequent explanations, who relaxed parental control during adolescence (by comparison with preadolescent levels), and "who employed a democratic structure of decision making within the family."

Horowitz, F., Hetherington, E., Scarr-Salapatek, S., Siegel, G., (Eds.), *Child Development Research*, Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1975.

Overall this body of research provides impressive evidence that harshness of parental punishment is likely to be associated with child aggression. This conclusion is somewhat more strongly supported for boys than girls. First, there are simply more studies with separate analyses for boys, and second, some studies have yielded rather complicated results for girls; for example, both Sears et al. (1953) and Becker et al. (1962) found ratings of maternal punitiveness to be related in a curvilinear fashion to girls' aggression in nursery school or kindergarten.