

Evaluation of the Positive Discipline in Everyday Parenting (PDEP) program

Submission date 18/08/2018	Recruitment status No longer recruiting	<input type="checkbox"/> Prospectively registered <input type="checkbox"/> Protocol
Registration date 10/09/2018	Overall study status Completed	<input type="checkbox"/> Statistical analysis plan <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Results
Last Edited 22/10/2025	Condition category Other	<input type="checkbox"/> Individual participant data

Plain English summary of protocol

Background and study aims

Research in Canada shows that many parents accept and use physical punishment with their children. Using physical punishment can be a risk factor for children. It has been linked with problems like physical aggression and strained parent-child relationships. The Positive Discipline in Everyday Parenting (PDEP) is a group program for parents that focuses on decreasing parents' use of physical punishment and increasing non-violent discipline. Preliminary findings show that PDEP can help to reduce parents' use of physical and emotional punishment and to improve parent-child relationships. PDEP also seems to work with different cultures and in different countries. Our study wishes to understand the effects of the PDEP program using a more rigorous research approach. This will allow us to make stronger conclusions about whether PDEP works to change the way parents think about discipline and the discipline strategies they use.

Who can participate?

Parents who have a child aged 2-6 and can communicate in English

What does the study involve?

There will be 2 groups of parents - those who will participate in the first PDEP group, and those who will be on a waiting list to participate in PDEP once the first is completed. Whilst the first PDEP program takes place, parents in both groups will complete study questionnaires, provide open-ended responses to challenging parenting scenarios, and participate in a brief videotaped interaction with their child. These data collection components will be completed at the start and end of the first PDEP program, and 1 and 3 months afterwards. The PDEP program will involve identifying long-term parenting goals, understand how children think and feel, and responding with positive discipline. Note that we will have both in-person PDEP programs as well as on-line groups - the latter was developed to respond to COVID-19 physical distancing measures. Since the end of the pandemic, agencies have decided to adopt a hybrid model, with some in-person groups and some virtual groups. At the end of the first PDEP program, parents who were in this group may be asked to take part in an interview to hear about what they found helpful and if they have any suggestions for improvements. Once the second PDEP program begins, we will not be collecting any more information or data.

What are the possible benefits and risks of participating?

The possible benefit to parents taking part in this program is the opportunity to learn new ways of parenting that do not involve punishment and can help to strengthen their relationship with their child. There are no major risks to parents taking part in this program, other than that they may feel tired from completing questionnaires, watching video clips and participating in an interview. Additionally, some questions in the questionnaires might make them feel a little uncomfortable, as they ask about parenting and their child's behaviour.

Where is the study run from?

University of Ottawa (Canada) as well as child and family centres in Ottawa and surrounding areas; 1 centre in southern Ontario (Canada); and 1 centre in Calgary, Alberta (Canada)

When is the study starting and how long is it expected to run for?

March 2017 to March 2024

Who is funding the study?

Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada (Canada)

Who is the main contact?

Dr. Elisa Romano, Ph.D., C.Psych.
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Contact information

Type(s)

Public

Contact name

Dr Elisa Romano

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Additional identifiers

Protocol serial number

435-2017-0194

Study information

Scientific Title

The Positive Discipline in Everyday Parenting (PDEP) program for community-based parents: a quasi-experimental study to examine parenting behaviours, stress, emotion regulation, problem solving and discipline attitudes, along with child behaviours

Acronym

PDEP Study

Study objectives

Current study hypothesis as of 24/09/2024:

In the summer of 2021, the team decided to add several tasks to the evaluation that were not based on parental self-report. The first task involved a child-parent videotaped interaction that was 10 minutes in length. This task was completed at pre- and post-PDEP, as well as at 1-month follow-up and 3-month follow-up (only for the experimental group at 3-month follow-up). The videotapes were coded using a system on which the research group was trained for parental and child constructs.

It was hypothesized that compared to the wait-list group, parents who complete PDEP (in the experimental group) will be rated higher on positive parent and child behaviours (e.g., parental sensitivity, child engagement) and lower on negative behaviours (e.g., parental hostility). Any gains for the experimental group are expected to be maintained through the two follow-up sessions.

The other task introduced was around parental responses to challenging parenting scenarios. Parents were presented with three challenging scenarios and asked how they would respond. The responses were audio recorded, transcribed, and coded as per a manual developed to map punitive parenting practices and positive discipline. This task was completed at pre- and post-PDEP, and at 3-month follow-up (only for the experimental group).

It is hypothesized that compared to the wait-list group, the responses of parents who complete PDEP (in the experimental group) will tap into more constructs around a positive discipline (e.g., warmth, parental emotion regulation) and into fewer constructs around punishment (e.g., yelling, hitting, time-out). Any gains for the experimental group are expected to be maintained through the 3-month follow-up period.

Current study hypothesis as of 05/08/2021:

1. Compared to the wait-list group, parents who complete the PDEP program (in the experimental group) will report significantly greater use of non-punitive parenting behaviours, less favourable attitudes toward physical punishment, less stress, better emotion regulation, better problem-solving, and fewer child behaviour problems. Parents in the experimental group will also demonstrate more positive parenting behaviours from pre- to post-program, compared with parents in the wait-list group.
2. These gains for the PDEP parents in the experimental group will be maintained at 1 and 3-month follow-up.

Previous study hypothesis:

1. Compared to the wait-list group, parents who complete the PDEP program (in the experimental group) will report significantly greater use of non-punitive parenting behaviours, less favourable attitudes toward physical punishment, less stress, better emotion regulation, better problem-solving, and fewer child behaviour problems.
2. These gains for the PDEP parents in the experimental group will be maintained at 1 and 3-month follow-up.

Ethics approval required

Ethics approval required

Ethics approval(s)

approved 04/07/2018, Office of Research Ethics and Integrity, University of Ottawa (550 Cumberland Street, Room 154, Ottawa, K1N 6N5, Canada; +1 613-562-5800; ethics@uottawa.ca), ref: H-05-18-630

Study design

Interventional multi-centre quasi-experimental study with an internal qualitative interview study to examine parental perceptions of the intervention

Primary study design

Interventional

Study type(s)

Treatment

Health condition(s) or problem(s) studied

Parenting behaviours

Parenting attitudes toward physical punishment

Parenting skills (stress, emotion regulation, problem solving)

Child behaviours

Interventions

Current interventions as of 24/09/2024:

It should be noted that, while the goal was randomization of parents to either the experimental or wait-list control group, the majority of parents who participated in the research did not agree to randomization (primarily because of timing and scheduling issues) so the research design can best be described as quasi-experimental.

Two additional evaluation tasks have been added - namely the videotaped child-parent interactions and the parental responses to challenging parenting scenarios. The administration of these tasks followed the same procedures outlined below.

An analogue measure was not used in the end.

Also, as updated in the project title, the study design still included an experimental and wait-list control. However, parents were not randomly assigned as only a minority of parents agreed with this component of the study. Given the retention of as large of a sample size as possible, it was decided to adopt a quasi-experimental approach so that parents could choose when they wished to complete the PDEP program.

PDEP was developed to prevent violence against children. It is a universal group program for parents of children from newborn to 18 years that focuses on helping parents shift away from rewards and punishments towards problem-solving and communication. There are 8 2-hour sessions for parents, and group sizes may vary from 5 to 20 parents. Note that because of COVID-19, there is also an online version of the PDEP program that will be available starting in the fall of 2021. The content is the same but the program extends over 9 2-hour sessions to allow some time to explain the technology to parents and to allow time for the program facilitators to use the various technological options (e.g., Zoom, excel sheets). Trained PDEP facilitators deliver the program through community-based centres. The sessions will involve the identification of long-term parenting goals, providing warmth and structure, understanding how children think and feel at different ages, and problem-solving and responding with positive discipline.

For the research design, approximately 2-3 weeks before the start of the first PDEP group within an agency, all parents who provided verbal consent will be contacted by the researchers to invite them to complete a questionnaire package (after providing written consent). There are 2 additional data collection components in which parents may participate: 1) brief videotaped parent-child interaction and 2) parental open-ended responses to three scenarios developed around challenging parenting scenarios (e.g., the child is not ready to leave the home even though the child and parent are late for an appointment). After parents have one or more of the data collection components (i.e., questionnaire, interaction, scenarios) and before the start of the first PDEP group, parents will be contacted by the researchers and informed of their assignment to either this first PDEP group (experimental group) or the wait-list condition.

Parents in the first PDEP group will complete the 8-week program (or 9 weeks if online). Within 1 week of the program ending, all parents will be invited to complete the data collection components a second time. All parents will again be asked to complete the data collection components for a third time approximately 1 month after completion of the first PDEP group. The data collection components will be completed for a fourth time approximately 3 months after completion of the first PDEP group. Finally, after completion of the first group (experimental group in the fall), a subset of parents will be invited to complete a one-on-one interview to better understand their perceptions of the PDEP program.

Current interventions as of 05/08/2021:

Parents will be randomly assigned to participate in the PDEP program (experimental group) or a wait-list condition (where they will participate in the PDEP program once the experimental group has been completed).

PDEP was developed with the aim of preventing violence against children. It is a universal group program for parents of children newborn to 18 years that focuses on helping parents shift away from rewards and punishments towards problem-solving and communication. There are 8 2-hour sessions for parents, and group sizes may vary from 5 to 20 parents. Note that because of COVID-19, there is also an online version of the PDEP program that will be available starting in the fall of 2021. The content is the same but the program extends over 9 2-hour sessions to allow some time to explain the technology to parents and to allow time for the program facilitators to use the various technological options (e.g., Zoom, excel sheets). Trained PDEP facilitators deliver the program through community-based centres. The sessions will involve the identification of long-term parenting goals, providing warmth and structure, understanding how children think and feel at different ages, and problem-solving and responding with positive discipline.

For the research design, approximately 2-3 weeks prior to the start of the first PDEP group within an agency, all parents who provided verbal consent will be contacted by the researchers to invite them to complete a questionnaire package (after providing written consent). There are 2 additional data collection components in which parents may participate: 1) brief videotaped parent-child interaction and 2) parental open-ended responses to three scenarios that we developed around challenging parenting scenarios (e.g., child is not ready to leave the home even though the child and parent are late for an appointment). After parents have one or more of the data collection components (i.e., questionnaire, interaction, scenarios) and prior to the start of the first PDEP group, parents will be contacted by the researchers and informed of their assignment to either this first PDEP group (experimental group) or the wait-list condition. We will randomly assign parents to either the first or second PDEP group by way of a random numbers table. We will use this randomization strategy each time that PDEP is offered. For

example, if PDEP were offered in the fall of 2018 in one agency and 20 parents had expressed an interest in the research study, we would randomly assign 10 parents to PDEP and 10 to the wait-list group.

Parents who are randomly assigned to the first PDEP group will complete the 8-week program (or 9 weeks if online). Within 1 week of the program ending, all parents (those who just completed PDEP and those on the wait-list) will be invited to complete the data collection components a second time. All parents will again be asked to complete the data collection components for a third time approximately 1 month after completion of the first PDEP group. The data collection components will be completed for a fourth time approximately 3 months after completion of the first PDEP group, but it should be noted that this will only occur for parents who completed the program because those on the wait-list will have begun their PDEP program by this point in time so as to avoid any further delays in receiving services. Finally, after completion of the first group (experimental group in the fall), we will invite a subset of parents to complete a one-on-one interview so that we may better understand their perceptions of the PDEP program.

Added 15/12/2022:

It should be noted that, while the goal was randomization of parents to either the experimental or wait-list control group, the majority of parents who participated in the research did not agree to randomization (primarily because of timing and scheduling issues) so the research design can best be described as quasi-experimental.

Previous interventions:

Parents will be randomly assigned to participate in the PDEP program (experimental group) or a wait-list condition (where they will participate in the PDEP program once the experimental group has been completed).

PDEP was developed with the aim of preventing violence against children. It is a universal group program for parents of children newborn to 18 years that focuses on helping parents shift away from rewards and punishments towards problem-solving and communication. There are 8 2-hour sessions for parents, and group sizes may vary from 5 to 20 parents. Trained PDEP facilitators deliver the program through community-based centres. The sessions will involve the identification of long-term parenting goals, providing warmth and structure, understanding how children think and feel at different ages, and problem-solving and responding with positive discipline.

For the research design, approximately 2-3 weeks prior to the start of the first PDEP group within an agency, all parents who provided verbal consent will be contacted by the researchers to invite them to complete a questionnaire package (after providing written consent). After parents have completed the self-report questionnaires and prior to the start of the first PDEP group, parents will be contacted by the researchers and informed of their assignment to either this first PDEP group (experimental group) or the wait-list condition. We will randomly assign parents to either the first or second PDEP group by way of a random numbers table. We will use this randomization strategy each time that PDEP is offered. For example, if PDEP were offered in the fall of 2018 in one agency and 20 parents had expressed an interest in the research study, we would randomly assign 10 parents to PDEP and 10 to the wait-list group.

Parents who are randomly assigned to the first PDEP group will complete the 8-week program. Within 1 week of the program ending, all parents (those who just completed PDEP and those on the wait-list) will be invited to complete the questionnaire package for a second time. All parents will again be asked to complete the questionnaire for a third time approximately 1 month after completion of the first PDEP group. The questionnaire package will be completed for a fourth time approximately 3 months after completion of the first PDEP group, but it should be noted that this will only occur for parents who completed the program because those on the

wait-list will have begun their PDEP program by this point in time so as to avoid any further delays in receiving services.

In addition to the parent self-report questionnaires, we also intend to use an analogue measure (video clips of parent-child interactions) for a subset of parents (starting in the second year of data collection). The procedure for administering this measure will follow that of the questionnaires, namely prior to the start of the first PDEP program and then again at post-PDEP as well as at 1 and 3 month follow-up.

Intervention Type

Behavioural

Primary outcome(s)

Current primary outcome measure as of 24/09/2024:

Unless specified, the following measures are assessed at baseline (pre-PDEP program), at the end of the program (post-PDEP program, and 1 and 3 months after the end of the program.

1. Socio-demographics, assessed by parent self-report at the baseline
2. Approval of physical and non-physical punishment, assessed using the PDEP Questionnaire
3. Subjective developmental norms, assessed using the PDEP Questionnaire
4. Parenting self-efficacy, assessed using the PDEP Questionnaire
5. Use of various disciplinary strategies, assessed using the PDEP Questionnaire
6. Attitudes towards spanking, assessed using the Attitudes Towards Spanking (ATS) Scale
7. Parenting stress, assessed using the Parenting Daily Hassles (PDH) Scale
8. Emotion regulation, assessed using the Difficulties in Emotion Regulation Scale (DERS)
9. Problem solving, assessed using the Personal Problem Solving Inventory
10. Child behaviours, assessed using the Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ)
11. Parenting practices, assessed using the Mindfulness in Parenting Questionnaire (MPQ), as well as through coding of parents' open-ended responses to three challenging parenting scenarios and coding of brief parent-child interactions (using the observational coding system called Emotional Availability Scales).
12. Videotaped coding for parental and child behaviours, assessed using the Emotional Availability Scale (Biringne) and the Ainsworth Parental Sensitivity Scale
13. Coding, as per the developed manual, of the parental responses to challenging scenarios to capture positive discipline (as defined through the PDEP program) and punishment

Previous primary outcome measure as of 05/08/2021:

Unless specified, the following measures are assessed at baseline (pre-PDEP program), at the end of the program (post-PDEP program, and 1 and 3 months after the end of the program.

1. Socio-demographics, assessed by parent self-report at the baseline
2. Approval of physical and non-physical punishment, assessed using the PDEP Questionnaire
3. Subjective developmental norms, assessed using the PDEP Questionnaire
4. Parenting self-efficacy, assessed using the PDEP Questionnaire
5. Use of various disciplinary strategies, assessed using the PDEP Questionnaire
6. Attitudes towards spanking, assessed using the Attitudes Towards Spanking (ATS) Scale
7. Parenting stress, assessed using the Parenting Daily Hassles (PDH) Scale
8. Emotion regulation, assessed using the Difficulties in Emotion Regulation Scale (DERS)
9. Problem solving, assessed using the Personal Problem Solving Inventory
10. Child behaviours, assessed using the Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ)
11. Parenting practices, assessed using the Mindfulness in Parenting Questionnaire (MPQ), as well as through coding of parents' open-ended responses to three challenging parenting scenarios and coding of brief parent-child interactions (using the observational coding system called Emotional Availability Scales).

Previous primary outcome measure:

Unless specified, the following measures are assessed at the baseline, at the end of the intervention, and 1 and 3 months after the end of the intervention

1. Socio-demographics, assessed by patient self-report at the baseline
2. Approval of physical and non-physical punishment, assessed using the PDEP Questionnaire
3. Subjective developmental norms, assessed using the PDEP Questionnaire
4. Parenting self-efficacy, assessed using the PDEP Questionnaire
5. Use of various disciplinary strategies, assessed using the PDEP Questionnaire
6. Attitudes towards spanking, assessed using the Attitudes Towards Spanking (ATS) Scale
7. Parenting stress, assessed using the Parenting Daily Hassles (PDH) Scale
8. Emotion regulation, assessed using the Difficulties in Emotion Regulation Scale (DERS)
9. Problem solving, assessed using the Personal Problem Solving Inventory
10. Child behaviours, assessed using the Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ)
11. Parenting discipline attitudes, assessed through questioning parents after watching video clips of parent-child interactions

Key secondary outcome(s)

Parent satisfaction with the intervention, assessed using an interview with a subset of randomly selected parents at the end of the intervention. This interview will explore their experience with the PDEP program, including what was and was not helpful, the changes they experienced in their parenting attitudes, behaviours, and skills, and to what they attributed the changes.

Completion date

31/03/2024

Eligibility

Key inclusion criteria

Carers (parents) who:

1. Have a child aged 2-6 years
2. Feel comfortable with the English language
3. Are not completing any other parenting program while they are completing PDEP (or while they are waiting to complete PDEP should they be assigned to the wait-list condition)

Participant type(s)

Carer

Healthy volunteers allowed

No

Age group

Adult

Lower age limit

2 years

Upper age limit

6 years

Sex

All

Total final enrolment

183

Key exclusion criteria

Not meeting the key inclusion criteria

Date of first enrolment

01/09/2018

Date of final enrolment

31/10/2023

Locations

Countries of recruitment

Canada

Study participating centre

Arnprior Family Preschool Resource Centre - EarlyON Centre

16 Edward St. S Suite 130

Arnprior

Canada

K7S 3W4

Study participating centre

Families Matter

3404 – 25th St. NE

Calgary

Canada

T1Y 6C1

Study participating centre

Orleans-Cumberland Community Resource Centre - EarlyON Centre

105-240 boul. Centrum Blvd.

Orléans

Canada

K1E 3J4

Study participating centre

EarlyON Child & Family Centre - Pembroke

464 Isabella Street

Pembroke
Canada
K8A 0A4

Study participating centre
Haldimand Norfolk R.E.A.C.H.
101 Nanticoke Creek Parkway
Townsend
Canada
N0A 1S0

Study participating centre
Vanier Community Service Centre
290 Depuis St.
Ottawa
Canada
K1L 1A2

Study participating centre
Community Resource Centre - Killaloe
15 Lake Street
Killaloe
Canada
K0J 2A0

Study participating centre
Pinecrest Queensway Community Health Centre
1365 Richmond Road
Ottawa
Canada
K2B 6R7

Study participating centre
Child Reach
265 Maitland Street
London
Canada
N6B 2Y3

Sponsor information

Organisation

University of Ottawa

ROR

<https://ror.org/03c4mmv16>

Funder(s)

Funder type

Not defined

Funder Name

Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada

Alternative Name(s)

Conseil de recherches en sciences humaines, Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council, sshrc_crsh, Conseil de recherches en sciences humaines du Canada, Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council - sshrc crsh, Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council (SSHRC), Conseil de recherches en sciences humaines (CRSH), SSHRC, SSHRC-CRSH

Funding Body Type

Government organisation

Funding Body Subtype

National government

Location

Canada

Results and Publications

Individual participant data (IPD) sharing plan

The datasets generated during and/or analysed during the current study may be available should there be any joint research projects with researchers in other settings.

IPD sharing plan summary

Available on request

Study outputs

Output type	Details	Date created	Date added	Peer reviewed?	Patient-facing?
Results article		26/08/2025	22/10/2025	Yes	No