




Family Discipline in Context


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Definition

Discipline is guidance of children's moral, emotional and physical development, enabling them to take responsibility for themselves when they are older. It involves helping children become aware of the boundaries of acceptable and unacceptable behaviour, and teaching them cultural norms and values for relating to the world around them






Background

- Research shows disciplinary practices during childhood have lifelong consequences
 - Most previous research has focused on broad surveys and physical punishment - NZ parents favour relatively negative disciplinary techniques (Ritchie & Ritchie; Maxwell)
 - Need for better parent education and support in context of legal change in NZ
 - Little knowledge of the challenges parents face in using discipline in everyday contexts
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Research Questions

- What do New Zealand families with preschool age children believe about appropriate disciplinary practices for children?
 - What are the range and typical uses of discipline in New Zealand families?
 - How are family disciplinary practices influenced by context and events over time?
 - What type of support (if any) do families receive in their parenting with young children?
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Method

- Multimethod approach - semi-structured parent interviews, parent diaries, the Parenting Daily Hassles scale.
 - 100 families -117 caregivers interviewed – 98 females, 19 males
 - Audiotapes, coded numerically, and selectively transcribed.
 - 91.54% agreement between independent coders.\
 - Data collected between Dec 2006 and July 2008
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Authoritative

More than a third (38.5%) of parents used an authoritative parenting approach - characterised by warmth, responsiveness, involvement, reasoning, combined with firm boundaries.

Q. What is your approach to bringing up children?

A. I am easy going but I want him to know where he stands as well and things that are right. I want to be someone he can trust; when he is older he can come to me when he has problems. Have the confidence to tell me rather than hide it and not tell me - gotta stick to it or he is going to think if I go on long enough Mummy will buy them for me.

(Participant 90)

Mixed

More than a third of parents (37.6%) used a mixed approach to discipline (sometimes strict sometimes easy going).

I am firm on some behaviour. I am really strict on the physical behaviour. I am easy going on a lot of other things. I always make sure I have time on my side and I have a big philosophy of it. It doesn't matter in the big picture of things. I am not ever going to scrap over food. If you don't want to eat I don't care. I am firm on bed time. I am firm on specific things. (Participant 95)

Authoritarian

Less than one in 25 parents (3.4%) used an authoritarian approach - involving power assertion and demands for complete obedience without reasoning.

When Mum's away [referring to partner] I get on top of them hard and fast, not violently. I'm in charge. Mum's away. I am the one you are taking notice of and after 30 minutes they will start taking heed of it. K is too easy with J especially I would give J a bit more of a decent hiding. I would straighten them out a bit. We are advocates of a smacked bum. (Participant 6)

Permissive

About 1 in 10 parents (10.3%) had a permissive style characterised by warmth, but low monitoring and expectations.

I think I am quite relaxed. Promote her self esteem and to help her make her own choices. I have no problems with what she wears during the day as long as she is clean and warm. We don't have a set bed time. I don't have many rules. I am fully into negotiating. (Participant 73)




Influences on Parenting

1 Own Upbringing

More than three quarters (79.5%) said that they had been influenced by their own upbringing.

Seeing and hearing what happens around your own personal experience when you were growing up, how your parents disciplined you and whether you think that's right or wrong, and decide to go with it or (get rid of it) if need be. (Participant 27)






2 Written Information

More than half (58.1%) were influenced by written information

P: Handout – Arohamowai – Born to Learn – Family Start. And it's a brilliant handout. I'm finding it interesting.

I: Do they have any influence on what you do with your own children?

P: Oh big influence, yup, small things. (Participant 34)






3 Current Family

41% said that they were influenced by current family members.


*So through watching my sisters raise their children and things like that.
(Participant 30)*

*If I'm looking for assistance from family I've got an aunty who works with autistic kids and I'll talk to her.
(Participant 2)*





Other influences

- TV/Radio (36.8%)
 - Friends (36.8%)
 - Professionals (30.8%)
 - Own education (30.8%)
 - Religion (16.2%)
 - Internet (15.4%)
 - Cultural background (11%)
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Doing it differently

- ⊙ *We were sort of brought up with the whack, you know so we sort of lived off the wooden spoon and the jandal..I think I'm just trying to just sort of flush that away a bit - like considering how big I am. One swipe and I could probably kill him. (Participant 47)*
- ⊙ *We are bringing up our children quite differently from our parents. A general move away from smacking children. More timeout. Sometimes I think my parents are secretly thinking that [child] needs a good hiding and we have had discussions around that. (Participant 84)*



A supportive friend

From R [friend] and Playcentre. Very supportive and hopefully I am able to impart some tips to others now. I remember someone saying to me when [child] was having a tantrum, someone said, this is when you walk away because I was trying to engage him because I was embarrassed. That was just a supporting gentle way of giving me a bit of a hint and it worked.



Use and Effectiveness

Techniques	Use (%)	Effective	Ineffective
Timeout	82	43	20
Distraction	77	27	9
Reward system	76	24	15
Praise	69	11	3
Withdrawal of privileges	60	30	10
Reasoning	58	10	6
Smack	41	9	34
Shout	41	5	26
Ignore	38	5	8
Hugs & smiles	31	9	1
Make children apologise	18	2	-

Timeout

Timeout was the most commonly used technique (by 82%). 43% thought that it was effective and 20% thought that it was ineffective.


- © *Timeout definitely gives a very strong message that we didn't like what he did and I mean the fact that we haven't used it lately possibly means that it did work and it did get the message across. (Participant 43)*
- © *I give him one warning. I tell him not to go near the steps. If he does it again I find him a naughty corner. He stays for a minute which is good cos he doesn't need any more. A minute's long enough. (Participant 90)*



Withdrawal of Privileges

60% of parents withdrew privileges - 30% thought that this was effective and 10% thought that it was ineffective.

At the moment my big focus is on tidying his room, like I'll help him if he decides to do it, and if he decides he doesn't want to do it we take his toys away, anything that's on the floor gets taken away, but yeah just taking away privileges. (Participant 85)



Rewards and Praise

- 76% used rewards - 24% found them effective and 15% found them ineffective.

We did it [star charts] for toilet training and it worked a treat. (Participant 97)

- 69% used praise - 11% found this effective and 3% found it ineffective.

Lots of praise, so we've used praise to sort of to try and shape his behaviour. Lots and lots of praise, particularly if he's been regularly doing something not right and if he does it well catching him and 'That's brilliant' and giving him a kiss or a cuddle. He loves doing the right thing – you can tell. (Participant 82)

Smacking

41% of parents said that they had smacked but the diary data suggests that this was very infrequent. (Less than 3% actually used smacking in the 2 week diary period.) There were almost no examples of effectiveness - but here is one. Only 9% thought that smacking was effective.

*With K, a smack is the most effective. If she is sitting on M she will be told to get off. She will be given the count of three to get off, she will be removed from him. She goes back and does it again she will have her backside smacked. That works. One, two, three, then they know what's coming and she prepares herself and that's worse than the actual smack. I use the count on it's own sometimes come on get ready - one, two, three.
(Participant 56)*

Smacking (ineffective)


34% (the largest number of any technique) thought that smacking was ineffective.

We tried slapping him on the hand when he ran across the road without looking. He just started slapping us on the hand, so it had quite a negative effect cos he thought how you reacted when you got angry was to smack somebody on the hand. (Participant 29)

And I'd smack his hand but it wouldn't do anything, and my hand would be tingling and he wouldn't be crying, so he has got a high pain threshold. I thought 'This isn't right'. (Participant 76)



Diary Data

- The most frequently used (77%) technique was Verbal Instruction (telling the child to do or not to do something)
 - The second most frequently used techniques were verbal warning and praise (59% for each). (Only 28% used timeout).
 - The third most frequent (45%) approach was distraction
 - Next were reward (43%) and explanation (42%)
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The effect of context

53% of parents said that they disciplined children differently in different situations - such as the supermarket, the coffee shop or a friend's place.

© *At the supermarket it's a nightmare. I have used the naughty spot at the supermarket. It is time consuming and it doesn't work straight away. It's embarrassing. I can't stand it, it is just too hard. (Participant 67)*

© *At the supermarket, it's about 4 or 5pm. I give him whatever he jolly well wants, the lolly or the chocolate or whatever and the ride on the car and then I am out of there. People give us the filthy eye. He swears. I try to ignore. I feel I am expected to respond by other parents that are shopping. (Participant 49).*

Stress

- The most common - tiredness (47%)
- The second most common - workload (38%)
- The third most common - child characteristics (20%) e.g. health issues like asthma or a 'difficult' child
- 18% of parents had physical health problems, and 15% mentioned depression
- The frequency and intensity of Parenting Hassles increased with the number of stresses.

Support and Advice

- Most likely sources of support were:-

- ⊙ Family (52%)
- ⊙ Early childhood teacher (44%)
- ⊙ Friends (35%)


- Gave most useful advice

- ⊙ Early childhood teacher (29%)
- ⊙ Family (26%)
- ⊙ Books (26%)
- ⊙ Friends (20%)




Support from Family

L's parents come through maybe once a month on average and they stay and that's really nice, good for them and us and they can't get enough of the kids, and my mum is usually through once every two weeks, every three weeks so we'll take those opportunities. And we often go through too, and leave them there and have a night out or something. (Participant 5)






Support from EC Teacher

- © *When I talked to L (early childhood teacher) she put a good perspective on it. She said you just have to remember to pick your fights and it is probably not worth fighting over clothes and she's absolutely right. (Participant 33)*
 - © *When you've got people like the kindy teachers. I feel bad asking them because it's not their job (well I kind of think it is). At least it is somewhere to go and they don't mind. (Participant 18)*
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Partner

- *My husband and I talk about it. We have to work out how we are going to do it together. (Participant 94)*
 - *My husband just, he just takes over basically when he comes home and yeah, we usually do things together in the weekend. (Participant 19)*
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No Support (Moving to a Rural Town)


There is not anyone here I can ask. I drive. I wouldn't be able to cope on buses. It is not the smallest place. I have made friends but they are not my friends. One of those areas where everyone knows everyone and was brought up with everyone. It's hard if you're not from here. If you are not from round here and you live here it is not easy. (Participant 98)





No Support (A Young Single Mum)

I am on my own but I do have a partner at the moment but he doesn't live with me. I never really got a good start. Mum always had that thing like you have decided to have kids, you deal with them. Most young girls live with their parents. I wasn't in the right frame of mind and Mum has just thrown me in the deep end. I would have been able to handle it a lot more if I had been able to have Mum's support. But I have done it myself completely. (Participant 96)



Summary

- Majority of parents use authoritative or mixed approach (ie sometimes they are permissive)
- Positive methods (rewards, praise and reasoning) more commonly used than negative methods (smacking or shouting). Timeout the most common punishment.
- No enthusiasm for physical punishment.
- Own experience of parenting important - but can be rejected.
- Books and TV hugely important source of info and support.
- Family and friends important supports but also early childhood teachers (other professionals less mentioned)



Implications

Importance of:-

- Making sure all parents have access to support (especially hard to reach parents)
 - Access to good written information and media presentations
 - Access of professionals to recent research-based but practical knowledge of effective discipline so they can help parents
 - More recognition for early childhood teachers' role as parent supporters
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