



PARENT EFFECTIVENESS TRAINING(P.E.T.)

The overlooked skills in child abuse prevention

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Background

Parent Effectiveness Training (P.E.T.) was developed in 1962 by American psychologist, Dr Thomas Gordon (nominated three times for the Nobel Peace Prize). Dr Gordon was a student and colleague of Dr Carl Rogers, and hence was heavily influenced by Roger's client-centred approach.

P.E.T. is a Rogerian, relationship-based, democratic approach to parenting. It is applicable across cultures, and the book has been translated into 32 languages, with the course being taught in 43 countries, including China, Maldives, Korea, Romania and Saudi Arabia.

P.E.T. has been well researched, with positive findings.

P.E.T. teaches relationship skills in the form of respectful communication. The approach emphasises mutual respect, and does not use rewards and punishment (such as time-out or star charts) to change child behaviour.

P.E.T. is highly practical and experiential, and is generally run as a 24 hour course – 1x3 hour session for eight weeks. The course has been taught around Australia since the early 1970s.

P.E.T. core concepts

- ◆ Children do not misbehave – they behave to meet underlying needs
- ◆ Children and parents are people – each have needs to be met in relationship
- ◆ Parenting is about relationship
- ◆ Aim for win-win when there is a conflict – avoid win-lose
- ◆ Do not use rewards or punishment to change behaviour
- ◆ Seek a change in child behaviour because of consideration for parent's needs, not through compliance.
- ◆ Use the P.E.T. model to guide use of communication skills
- ◆ Parents cannot be unconditionally accepting
- ◆ Parents don't need to show a 'united front', but can be supportive of each other.
- ◆ Flexible parenting within family values.
- ◆ Parents can only change themselves, and can then aim to influence others through relationship.
- ◆ "Shifts focus in parenting from teaching compliance, to encouraging emotional self-responsibility through intensive skills training" (Wood and Davidson, 2003).

"Should be mandatory for all parents"

"[I am] listening more! Not threatening the children with power. Enjoying the kids more and making time to do things with them. [My children are] willing to talk more about feelings, problems"



"[I have] much less [sic] feelings of anger and frustration, more willing to work at child's level, not impose solutions. Calmer. [My children are] generally more loving and accepting of my needs re messy rooms etc."

Major Skills taught in P.E.T.

- **Understanding self and taking self-responsibility**
 - Through Thomas Gordon's unique model of separating parent's reactions from child's behaviour
- **Problem Ownership**
 - Thomas Gordon's second unique model helps parents determine whose needs are not being met in a situation
 - A guide for parents in choice of skill for a given situation
- **Active Listening**
 - Emotion coaching, empathy, emotional literacy, regulation of emotion
 - Major skill to uncover needs behind behaviour
- **I-messages**
 - Respectful assertiveness to meet parent's need, while maintaining relationship
 - Helps develop emotional awareness in parent; consideration of other's needs by child
- **Dealing with resistance**
 - Manage anger – child and parent
- **Win-win conflict resolution**
 - Alternative to parental power (that is, alternative to using rewards and punishment)
- **Values collision skills**

Observed effects on families who use P.E.T.

- ◆ Stops attribution of intent – parents do not see children as 'bad', 'deliberate', or take things as personally. Stops parents blaming children for parents own upset.
- ◆ Helps parents **VALUE** children as people
- ◆ Helps parents and children develop emotional intelligence and resilience
- ◆ Teaches life long relationship skills
- ◆ Parents can develop reflective parental functioning
- ◆ Reduces stress, parents more confident
- ◆ Parents more pro-active, rather than reactive
- ◆ Parents stop seeing children as being problems, but rather as having problems.
- ◆ Empowering for both children and parents
- ◆ Parents yell less, are more patient, less likely to be punitive
- ◆ Protective for children when there is a relationship breakdown between parents
- ◆ Children and parents happier with each other, enjoy being together
- ◆ Program attracts a high proportion of fathers and step-fathers
- ◆ Helps parents *delight* in their children.

P.E.T. offers an alternative to behavioural parenting approaches.

Prevents child abuse because:

- Helps parents establish a long-term, positive relationship with their children.
- Changes the way parents interpret their child's behaviour (attribution of intent), which is important in preventing child maltreatment (*Parenting Information Project*).
- Focuses on parent-child relationship, and is child-centred.
- Helps develop parental reflective functioning
- Parents give their children more TIME when using the relationship approach. (OECD rated Australia 18/27 on the question of time parents spend 'just talking' to 15 year olds more than once per week)
- The course is universal, so appeals to parents from all backgrounds
- Gives parents an alternative to punishment

References

- Commonwealth Department of Families and Community Services, 2004, *Parenting Information Project, Volume 1*, p7.
- (Wood and Davidson, 2003). *Helping Families Cope*. Family Matters No. 65.
- <http://www.gordontraining.com/about-origins-of-the-gordon-model.html>
- http://www.etia.org/uploadedImages/PET_Research_Overview.pdf
- "Parent Effectiveness Training" Thomas Gordon, 2005