



Q & A for Service Providers

Positive Discipline in Everyday Parenting

What is Positive Discipline in Everyday Parenting?

Positive Discipline in Everyday Parenting (PDEP) was developed in 2007 by Dr. Joan Durrant, a Child Psychologist and Professor at the University of Manitoba, in partnership with the international non-governmental organization, Save the Children.

PDEP began as a book for parents to help answer their question: “How can I teach my children without hitting or yelling?” The book was an instant success and soon there was demand for a training program for family-serving professionals who wanted to help parents learn this approach. Today the program includes the self-study Parent Book, a 9-week highly interactive Parent Program, and a 5-day Facilitator Training for staff of not-for-profit agencies.

The program has been delivered across Canada and in all regions of the world. The not-for-profit training centre, Positive Discipline in Everyday Life (PDEL), provides the high level of coordination and oversight required to make this possible.

Recently, with funding from the Public Health Agency of Canada, the parent program and facilitator training have been enhanced with trauma-and-violence-informed practice. This updated version of PDEP is now available in Canada in English and French.

What are the basic elements of PDEP?

PDEP is based on two foundational pillars – the elimination of physical and emotional punishment of children, and the promotion of the rights of all children as set out in the *Convention on the Rights of the Child* (United Nations General Assembly, 1989).

PDEP is based on the most current understanding about healthy child development informed by research in neurobiology, cognitive psychology, and emotional regulation. It is a strengths-based program that promotes children’s healthy development through fostering the parent/child relationship. Science has shown that children’s primary relationships (with parents, grandparents, and others) are the essential active ingredient in the development of children’s brains.

Who is PDEP for?

PDEP is a universal program – it is for parents, caregivers, and all those in a parenting role. It is intended for all families managing everyday parenting issues. It provides information that can help all adults better understand children, from infants to teenagers. It is inclusive of parents and children of all cultures, faiths, genders, ethnicities, and sexual orientations.

How does PDEP differ from other parenting programs?

PDEP aligns with many parenting programs but differs from those that use rewards and punishments to change children's behaviour. PDEP differs from those programs in several ways:

- The theoretical base is *developmental*, focusing on the importance of trust and attachment, helping parents understand children's perspectives, and strengthening the parent-child relationship.
- It is a *universal*, not targeted, program for parents of children from birth to 18 years of age.
- Its objectives are *parent related*, focused on decreasing parental punishment as opposed to enforcing child compliance.
- It teaches the critical life skill of *problem solving* to parents so they can model and teach it to their children.
- It is *non-prescriptive*; it provides a framework for parents to use in fostering healthy parent-child relationships and to develop appropriate solutions when inevitable parent/child conflicts arise.
- It is based on universal *children's rights standards*; it views children as autonomous persons with valid perspectives.

PDEP views child development not simply as a series of 'milestones' but rather in terms of how children's capacities develop over time in line with the developing brain. PDEP views children as learners, and parents as their first and most important mentors. It is based on consistent research findings showing that the learning relationship is fostered by a warm, nurturing environment that provides information, guidance, and support – not punishment.

What is the theoretical foundation of the program?

PDEP is based on years of research on child development and effective parenting. Parenting is a highly complex phenomenon; thus PDEP draws from the fields of attachment, neurobiology, parental self-efficacy, reflective function, parent mental health, and early child learning and care, to name a few.

PDEP focuses on the factors that *underlie* children's behaviour. Children's developmental understanding and brain development are reflected in their behaviour. Therefore, PDEP focuses on helping parents understand how children develop so they can respond constructively in the face of conflict.

How are Facilitators trained?

Trainings are hosted by non-profit family-serving agencies in their local communities. Each training is 5 full days in length and is conducted in-person. As part of the trauma-informed nature of PDEP, service providers attend the training in pairs, so they can co-facilitate programs together.

Following the training, each pair is mentored online as they plan and deliver their first PDEP parent programs. When they have completed the mentorship, they are eligible for certification as PDEP Program Facilitators.

Has PDEP been evaluated?

Funding from Save the Children, Grand Challenges Canada, Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council, Prairie Action Foundation, University of Manitoba, and Public Health Agency of Canada has supported the program's development and evaluation. First, the materials and training were piloted and revised over several years. Then procedures were established to assist communities in adapting the program to diverse contexts while maintaining program integrity.

When procedures for maximizing the consistency of program delivery were established, an international research team - with a range of expertise from evaluation research, child development, child protection, child rights, parenting, and public health - set out an evaluation plan. Since 2012, the team has been collecting data from all regions of the world using pre/post questionnaires measuring change in both Facilitators' and parents' attitudes, beliefs and emotional responses to conflict with children, as well as their satisfaction with various components of the program.

The data show that parents overwhelmingly feel that PDEP has improved their relationships with their children (Ateah et al., 2023; Durrant et al., 2014; Durrant et al., 2017; Durrant et al. 2020). Parents around the world have been highly satisfied with the program and virtually all would recommend it to other parents. An independent study comparing parents who took PDEP to parents in wait-list control showed that PDEP reduces physical and emotional punishment and increases proactive parenting (Romano & Yilmaz, 2025).

Where can I get more information?

For information about the parent program and Facilitator training, visit the website of Positive Discipline in Everyday Life: www.pdel.org

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