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## An evaluation of “Positive Discipline for the Gifted and Talented”

*an Adlerian-based parenting training tailored to the needs of parents of gifted and talented children.*



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## **Introduction.**

Gifted and talented children have specific educational, social and developmental needs, which are often not well-recognized. If a child's ability is not identified and supported, the child may become withdrawn, depressed, or exhibit behavioral problems leading to the loss of potential for both the individual and society as a whole (Morawska, 2009). Parents are particularly important in preventing social or emotional problems. Teaching, no matter how excellent or supportive, can seldom counteract inappropriate parenting. Supportive family environments, on the other hand, can counteract unhappy school experiences (Webb, 1994). There is a recognized need for family intervention for parents of gifted and talented children ( Morawska, 2009). The aim of this study is the development of a parenting training to support parents of gifted and talented children to develop an authoritative parenting style and to effectively deal with discipline issues and emotional issues. This study describes the tailoring of the Adlerian-based parenting training "Positive Discipline" to the needs of parents of gifted and talented children, and the results of a small pilot study to evaluate the efficacy of the program.

# 1. Theoretical background of “Positive Discipline for the Gifted and Talented” (PDGT).

## Specific child and parenting issues relevant to the gifted population.

Although gifted children as a group are not necessarily more or less well adjusted than any other group (Morawska, 2009), there is consensus that a number of factors may place individual gifted children at higher risk for developing behavioral or emotional problems. These factors include: asynchronous development (Fornia, 2001; Kieboom, 2007; Morawska, 2009; Webb, 2004), unrealistic expectations of parents and teachers (Morawska, 2009; Rimm, 2008), excessive and inappropriate use of praise (Dweck, 2008); (Morawska, 2009), parent over-involvement (Morawska, 2009; Rimm, 2008; Bruyn, 2009), a mismatch between the child’s ability and the instructional environment, and difficulties with peer groups (Fonseca, 2011; Morawska, 2009; Rimm, 2002; Webb, 2007).

When reviewing the scientific and professional literature on the social and emotional needs of the gifted and talented children one discovers that intensity, sensitivity, over-excitability, introversion, low self-esteem, perfectionism, anxiety and stress, depression and underachievement are often mentioned in relation to gifted and talented children (Daniels, 2009; Fonseca, 2011; Fornia, 2001; Kerr, 2009; Kieboom, 2007; Neihart, 2002; Porter, 2005; Probst, 2007; Rimm, 2008; Silverman, 2002; Webb, 2007; Whitley, 2001). These characteristics should be understood and handled well in order to prevent social and emotional problems and should therefore be addressed in the parenting program.

There is limited empirical research on the experience of parenting a gifted child. However, there is consensus that gifted children present particular challenges in terms of parenting (Fonseca, 2011; Fornia, 2001; Kerr, 2009; Kieboom, 2007; Morawska, 2009; Neihart, 2002; Porter, 2005; Probst, 2007; Rimm, 2008; Webb, 2007). According to Morawska (2009 p.164-165) these concerns include among others:

- meeting the child’s educational needs
- managing asynchronous development
- motivating the child and having the child take responsibility
- emotional issues; e.g. dealing with emotional outbursts, anxiety, depression, perfectionism
- helping children cope with differences, failure
- peer-relationships; helping the child build good social relationships
- discipline style; dealing with stubbornness, argumentative ways and undermining authority

## Parenting style and gifted and talented children.

The applied parenting style when dealing with emotional issues and handling discipline situations is of great importance and has a great impact on the family’s wellbeing. The parenting styles, described by Baumrind in 1966, are nowadays still generally used: authoritarian, permissive, authoritative and the disengaged parenting style. Baumrind (in: McVittie, 2009 p.265) “identified authoritative parents as being both demanding and responsive and noted that they monitor and impart clear standards for

their children’s conduct. They are assertive, but not intrusive or restrictive. Their disciplinary methods are supportive rather than punitive. In contrast she identified authoritarian parents as demanding and directive, but not responsive and noted that they are obedience- and status-oriented and expect their orders to be obeyed without explanation. They provide an orderly environment. Permissive parents are more responsive than demanding. They do not require mature behavior, allow considerable self-regulation, and avoid confrontation. The disengaged parenting style is nor demanding nor responsive. Disengaged parents do not structure and monitor, and are not supportive.” Figure 1 shows these parenting styles visually.

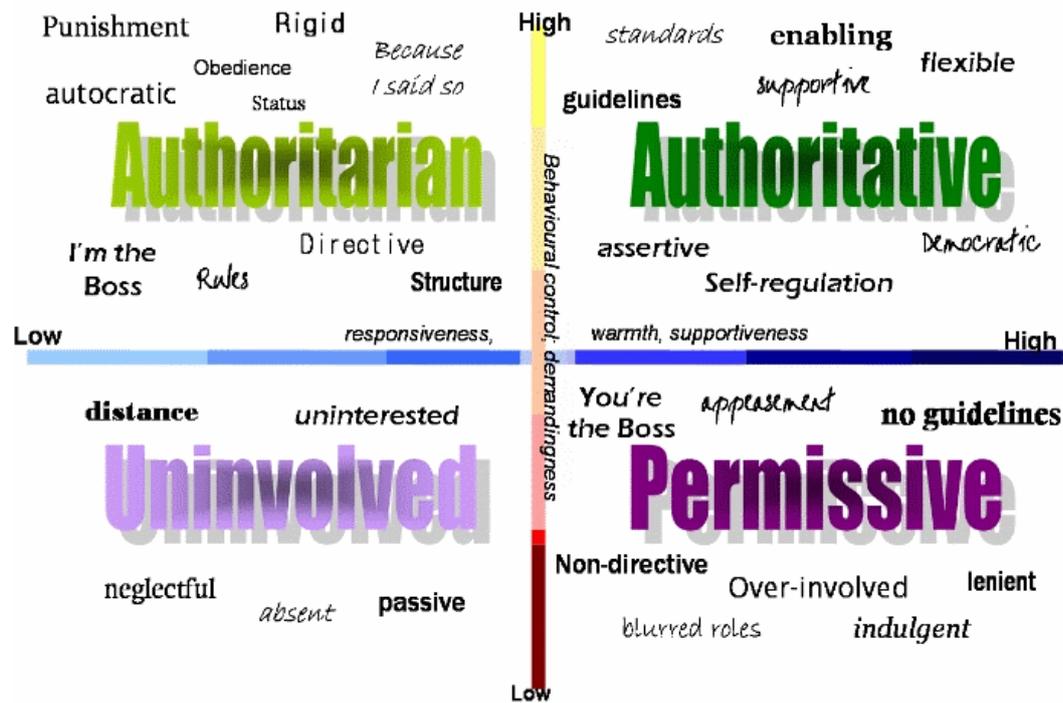


Figure 1: Parenting styles. (Robertson, 2011)

There is substantial evidence that the authoritative parenting style is the most effective parenting style promoting development and protecting from social risk (Assadi et al. , 2007; Baumrind, 1966; Dwairy, 2004; Steinberg, 2001; McVittie, 2009).

Although there is a lack of specified research on the impact of the parenting style on gifted and talented children, there is no reason to believe that the positive effects of the authoritative parenting style fail for gifted children. Porter compares theories of behavior management and concludes: “It is my judgment that the special needs of gifted children and the requirements that disciplinary practices be educational, ethical and effective in managing behavior all favor the authoritative or democratic approach to behavior management.” ( Porter, 1999, p. 218).

Parents often describe their gifted children as intense, difficult, challenging, strong willed, stubborn, argumentative, bossy, judgmental, and perfectionist (Webb, 2007). However, these difficulties arise rather from thinking independently and feeling passionately than from a desire to be deliberately disruptive. ( Porter, 1999, p. 202) Like Porter, it is my opinion that if we want to foster the gifted child’s creative, experimental, and independent attitude, the goal of discipline should be to teach children self-discipline and cooperation; not compliance through punishment and rewards.

Authoritative parenting strategies and tools are therefore indispensable when handling disciplining situations with gifted children.

The few available results of studies into the effect of parenting style on gifted children do confirm the positive effects of authoritative parenting on gifted children. Dwairy's study (2004) emphasizes the positive impact of the authoritative style on both gifted and non-gifted children across cultures. Results indicate that the negative effect of the authoritarian parenting style among Arabs is noticeable only in gifted children. The psychological adjustment of non-gifted Arab children seems to be less harmed by the authoritarian style.

Following Berman and Ryan & Deci, Renzulli states that "non-punitive environments open to exploration – rather than those which exert excessive control, provide low levels of challenge or lack of connectedness- allow for optimizing potential in the expression of physical and mental energy" (Renzulli, 2003, p. 82).

In a study evaluating academic success across three different social communities in Teheran, Assadi et al. (2007) found that authoritative parenting was the style associated with the highest academic outcome independent of socio-cultural context.

Anecdotally<sup>1</sup>, many parents of gifted children report difficulties with discipline-issues. They indicate that punishment and rewards do not seem to work and only make things worse. These reports also confirm the preference for authoritative parenting.

It's not so much the question which parenting style should be developed. The challenge ahead involves finding ways to educate parents with regard to how to be authoritative, and help those, who are not authoritative, to change.

## **Comparison of existing parenting trainings for parents of gifted and talented.**

Literature review displays two parenting trainings for parents of gifted and talented children:

### **1. "Gifted and Talented Triple P".**

Morawska and Sanders (2009) developed this nine-session program, based on Triple P (Positive Parenting Program) and specifically tailored for the needs of parents of gifted children. Triple P is a behavioral parenting intervention. To the authors' knowledge this is the first and only evidence-based parenting intervention that has been tailored and evaluated. Drawback to this approach is the use of rewards as a parenting strategy. Rewards may be interpreted as manipulative and may evoke resistance and resentment (Gordon, 1970; Nelsen, 1998, 2000, 2006, 2007).

### **2. The SENG Model (Supporting Emotional Needs of Gifted)**

The SENG-model (Webb & De Vries, 1998) has been used extensively to support parents of gifted children. When trying to fathom the SENG-model one recognizes the principles of the Adlerian-based Parenting Model: children lacking the skills to find an internal sense of belonging and significance in

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<sup>1</sup> Clients of Buro Mare (consultancy for parenting the gifted) as well as participants in Morawska's (2009) study

socially useful ways, find other, mistaken ways to approximate those feelings. Understanding misbehavior and its underlying goals gives direction in choosing the appropriate parenting strategy. Little is known about the efficacy of the SENG Model itself. There is some evidence for the efficacy of Adlerian-based parenting trainings in general. Parent-guardians reported statistically significant changes in parenting behavior after attending an Adlerian-based parenting class. Parents set clearer limits, increased their sense of positive connection, and harshness decreased (McVittie, 2009).

“Positive Discipline” is an example of a well developed Adlerian-based parenting training and will therefore in this study be taken as the basis for Adlerian-based parenting (Nelsen, 1998, 2000, 2006, 2007).

Triple P (Speetjens, 2007) and Positive Discipline (Nelsen, 1998, 2000, 2006, 2007) are both intervention programs to promote positive parenting. They both involve:

- parenting skills to promote children’s competence (quality time, talking with children, physical affection, attention, engaging activities, setting a good example, incidental teaching, & behavior charts )
- strategies to manage misbehavior (setting rules, clear instructions, directed discussion & quiet time)
- planning ahead and being proactive.

When comparing Triple P (Speetjens, 2007) and Positive Discipline (Nelsen, 1998, 2000, 2006, 2007) the following differences become apparent:

- Triple P teaches the use of praise and rewards to promote children’s competence. Practitioners of Positive Discipline see praise and rewards as manipulative, obedience-oriented and therefore as discouraging. Positive discipline focuses on encouragement instead.
- Triple P teaches, among others, time out and logical consequences to manage misbehavior. Positive discipline avoids the use of the conventional time out as well as logical consequences. Logical consequences often turn out to be disguised punishment. Punishment may lead to short-term success but is seen as very discouraging and enforcing misbehavior in the long term. Instead of punishment Positive Discipline focuses on understanding the underlying goals of misbehavior and teaches appropriate ways to meet these goals and to express feelings. Natural consequences, focusing on solutions, respectful follow through, positive time-out (in contrast to the conventional time out) and the teaching of problem-solving-skills are examples of Positive Discipline strategies to manage misbehavior.

In comparison to Triple P, Positive Discipline has a few advantages that fit the needs of parents of gifted and talented children:

Many gifted and talented children feel discouraged due to an ill-fitting environment. As discouragement is a major issue for gifted children, a parenting class is needed that enhances the understanding of discouraged behavior and provides tools to deal with it. Positive Discipline addresses the topic of discouragement thoroughly. It distinguishes between four different underlying goals behind discouraged behavior: seeking attention, power, revenge or withdrawal from adult demands. Understanding which goal is motivating the child’s antisocial behavior, helps to find ways

to respond appropriately. For example: children whose underlying goal is to seek power cooperate better when they are given limited choices in which they share power. Telling them what to do invites a power struggle.

Many parents of gifted children claim that their children are not sensitive to punishment nor to rewards. This can be understood if we look at the gifted child's nature. The goal of punishment and rewards is compliance. Compliance however is not compatible with a creative, experimental and independent nature of gifted children. If we want to foster the gifted child's nature the goal of discipline should be to teach children self-discipline and cooperation instead of teaching them compliance through punishment and rewards. Positive Discipline consists of setting clear boundaries and supporting children to find their own way to fit in. Positive Discipline does not involve punishment or rewards, but focuses on solutions and empowerment. Triple P on the other hand uses compliance orientated tools like time-out and rewards to manage children's behavior.

Excessive and inappropriate use of praise (Dweck, 2008; Morawska, 2009; Porter, 1999) and parent over-involvement (Bruyn, 2009; Morawska, 2009; Rimm, 2008) are mentioned as factors that may place individual gifted children at higher risk for developing behavioral or emotional problems. Positive Discipline addresses these issues broadly. Porter (1999) indicates that the strengths of Adlerian theory lie in its preventive aspects and its use of encouragement instead of praise.

On the basis of the fore mentioned advantages it can be expected that Positive Discipline provides a better fit than Triple P. In this study Positive Discipline is therefore taken as the starting point for a tailored parenting training.

## **The Curriculum of Positive Discipline for the Gifted and Talented (PDGT).**

Support of parents of gifted and talented children has focused mainly on supporting children educationally. The main aim of the parenting training in this study is supporting parents to find ways to be authoritative and to effectively deal with discipline issues and emotional issues. Understanding the impact of an ill-fitting (school)environment and how to deal with it, is obviously an important issue for gifted and talented children and their families. The subject is therefore covered briefly, but the emphasis in the parenting training is on developing authoritative parenting skills.

The curricula of the parenting trainings in this study included the following topics:

- understanding the impact of an ill-fitting environment and possibilities to adjust school environment and enhance peer contact (Colangelo, 2003; Webb, 2007)
- the impact of belonging and significance (Glenn, 2000; Nelsen, 2000, 2006, 2007; Lott, 2008)
- understanding the mistaken belief or goals about how to find belonging and significance that result in misbehavior and tools to handle misbehavior(Glenn,,2000; Nelsen, 2000, 2006, 2007; Lott, 2008)
- the impact of different parenting styles, (Glenn, 2000; Nelsen, 2000, 2006, 2007; Lott, 2008)
- the difference between proactive and reactive parenting, (Glenn, 2000; Nelsen, 2000, 2006, 2007; Lott, 2008)

- firmness and kindness at the same time (Glenn, 2000; Nelsen, 2000, 2006, 2007; Lott, 2008) ( being firm without being mean, kind without being permissive)
- focusing on solutions instead of punishment, (Glenn, 2000; Nelsen, 2000, 2006, 2007; Lott, 2008)
- the power of encouragement, (Glenn, 2000; Nelsen, 2000, 2006, 2007; Lott, 2008)
- avoiding over-involvement and micro-managing, (Glenn, 2000; Nelsen, 2000, 2006, 2007; Lott, 2008, Rimm, 2008)
- the difference between praise and encouragement, (Glenn, 2000; Nelsen, 2000, 2006, 2007; Lott, 2008)
- fostering a growth mindset versus a fixed mindset, (Dweck, 2008)
- perfectionism and how to deal with avoidance behavior, performance anxiety, (Fonseca, 2011, Kieboom, 2007; Koenderink, 2012; Webb, 2007)
- communication skills; expressing feelings, (Lott, 2008; Gordon, 1970)
- problem solving skills including family meetings, tools for handling conflict, (Gordon, 1970; Glenn, 2000; Nelsen, 2000, 2006, 2007; Lott, 2008)
- over-excitabilities; redirecting instead of correcting, (Daniels, 2009; Fonseca, 2011; Probst, 2007; Webb, 2007)
- introversion; redirecting instead of correcting (Fonseca, 2011; Webb, 2007)
- dealing with asynchronous development (Fonseca, 2011; Silverman, 2002; Kieboom, 2007; Webb, 2007)
- recognizing underachievement and changing patterns of interaction (Bruyn, 2009; Rimm, 2008; Whitley, 2001)

## 2. The Pilot study.

To assess how well the tailored Positive Discipline parenting training meets the needs of parents of gifted and talented children, a small pilot study was conducted.

It was examined whether attending “Positive Discipline for the gifted and talented” was effective in improving encouraging parental behavior and authoritative disciplining skills, in enhancing feelings of connectedness within the family and in reducing child problem behavior. In addition, it was looked at how well the parenting training met the parent’s needs.

First it was hypothesized that three dysfunctional discipline styles: laxness (permissive discipline), overreactivity (authoritarian discipline, displays of anger), and verbosity (overly long reprimands or reliance on talking) would diminish after attending the program.

Second it was hypothesized that feelings of satisfaction with family life would increase. Parental stress was expected to decrease.

Third it was hypothesized that after participating in PDGT children’s problem behavior would decrease.

### 2.1 Method.

#### Participants

Participants were 19 parents of gifted children under age 12; 7 couples and 5 individuals participated in the program. 63 % were mothers.

Children ranged 5–11 years. The completed questionnaires rated the experienced problems of 15 boys and 4 girls. The majority of the children were officially diagnosed as gifted; 2 children were not tested but showed many signs of being gifted and their parents were tested gifted.

Parents were predominantly middle class. 89% completed higher educational tracks.

All children lived in two-parent families. Per family either both or one parent participated in the intervention.

#### Measures

In this study the questionnaire “Praten met Kinderen” (Talking with Children) (Leijten, 2012) was used to assess parenting behavior and child problem behavior. The questionnaire consisted of:

- the Dutch translation of The Parenting Scale (Arnold, O’Leary, Wolff & Acker, 1993).
- Nijmeegse Vragenlijst voor de Opvoedsituatie (NVOS) (Questionnaire for assessing the parenting situation). (Wels & Robbroeckx, 1996).
- the Dutch translation of the Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ) (Goodman, 1997).

In addition a translation of McVittie's questionnaire on authoritative parenting behavior was submitted. (McVittie, 2009)

All questionnaires used in this study were filled out by the parents participating in the training.

### *Parenting behavior and disciplining style.*

The Parenting Scale is a rating scale designed to measure three dysfunctional discipline styles: laxness (permissive discipline), overreactivity (authoritarian discipline, displays of anger), and verbosity (overly long reprimands or reliance on talking). (Arnold, O'Leary, Wolff & Acker, 1993).

The Nijmeegse Vragenlijst voor de opvoedsituatie (Questionnaire for assessing the parenting situation) was used to assess parent's satisfaction or parental stress. Parents were asked to indicate their experienced stress on a 8-point scale; ranging from complete satisfaction without experiencing any problems to feelings of total despair.

McVittie's Questionnaire was designed to look at examples of firmness and connection in disciplining situations. Participants were asked to rate their behavior on a 4-point scale ( no, sometimes, often, usually).

### *Child problem behavior*

Children's problem behavior was assessed with the Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ). The SDQ is a brief behavioral screening questionnaire about 3-16 year olds. It consists of 25 items on psychological attributes, some positive and others negative. These 25 items are divided between 5 scales:

- Emotional symptoms ( 5 item)
- Conduct problems ( 5 items)
- Hyperactivity/inattention ( 5 items)
- Peer relationship problems ( 5 items)
- Prosocial behavior (5 items)

The scales have adequate internal consistency and good convergent validity (Goodman, 1997). Example items are "My child often fights with other children or bullies them" and "My child often loses temper". A total difficulties score was computed from the mean scores on all four problem scales.

## **Procedure**

Parents of gifted and talented children were recruited through:

- primary Leonardo-schools and regular primary schools through flyers and announcements in their newsletters for parents
- community centers and professionals working with gifted and talented children
- flyers and announcements conferences for the gifted and professionals working with the gifted target group
- advertisements in magazines aimed at the gifted target group ("Mensaberichten", "Tijdschrift Talent", "Regio Bulletin Pharos")
- announcements for special interest groups on LinkedIn.

Dealing with a disciplining situation with young children is very different from handling disciplining situations for teenagers. In order to promote exchange of experience big differences in approach were prevented by only acquiring parents of gifted and talented children younger than 12 years of age. Parents of gifted adolescents were excluded from the program.

Prior to commencement of the parenting training parents were invited to complete a range of questionnaires to assess parenting strategies and disciplining behavior, feelings of wellbeing and connectedness, and child problem behavior.

At the completion of the parenting training, parents were again asked to complete the questionnaires as well as questions that address the quality of the training and how well the parenting training met the parent's needs.

In addition to the questionnaire, parents were interviewed within a few weeks after completion of the parenting training. The parents were asked to comment on the strengths and weaknesses of the parenting training, whether they had noticed changes in behavior or feelings of wellbeing within the family, and how well the parenting training had met their needs.

## 2.2 Results

### Base rates.

#### *Parenting behavior before attending Positive Discipline for Gifted and Talented (PDGT).*

Parent-reported dysfunctional disciplining rated on the basis of The Parenting Scale. Prior to the intervention the mean scores of parents in the pilot on the total scale of dysfunctional parenting were above the clinical score ( $M=3.3$ ,  $SD=0.62$ ), as well as the mean scores on the subscales overreactivity ( $M=3.5$ ,  $SD=0.99$ ) and verbosity ( $M=3.7$ ,  $SD=0.83$ ) These results indicate that the participating parents experienced serious difficulties parenting their gifted children.

The same image is displayed by the results on het NVOS, measuring parental stress. Prior to the program 42% of the parents indicated significant up to serious parental problems and 16 % of the parents indicated they needed help urgently. Fifty-eight percent of the parents were moderately positive about their parenting skills but contemplated seeking advice for certain situations. No parents reported to feel satisfied about their parenting skills and not needing help.

#### *Children's problem behavior before attending PDGT.*

Prior to attending Positive Discipline for Gifted and Talented (PDGT), parents rated their child as experiencing more emotional problems ( $M=4.1$ ,  $SD=1.73$ ), more conduct problems ( $M=3.3$ ,  $SD=1.67$ ) and more peer problems ( $M=3.2$ ,  $SD=1.96$ ) than normal, but less than in the clinical/abnormal range. Also the Total difficulties scores ( $M=14.6$ ,  $SD=4.9$ ) fell within the borderline range. The score on the Hyperactivity scale ( $M=3.9$ ,  $SD=2.9$ ) as well as the score for pro-social behavior ( $M=7.0$ ,  $SD=2.47$ ) fell within the normal range. Table 1 shows the mean scores prior to attending PDGT compared to the normal scores.

	Normal Score	Pilot Score before PDGT
Total Difficulties Score	0 - 13	14,6
Emotional Symptoms Score	0 - 3	4,1
Conduct Problems Score	0 - 2	3,3
Hyperactivity Score	0 - 5	3,9
Peer Problems Score	0 - 2	3,2
Prosocial Behavior Score	6 - 10	7,0

Table 1: SDQ mean scores; Pilot group base rate scores compared to the normal scores.

### *Support questions before attending PDGT*

Before attending the PDGT parents indicated they wanted to learn more about the following subjects:

Appropriate parenting style that fits a gifted child. Four participants indicated specifically that they wanted to learn alternative disciplining strategies, other than punishment and rewards, to handle disciplining situations. They noted that their child was not sensitive to punishment and saw through rewards.

Participants wanted to learn how to deal with:

- emotional outbursts and rage of my child 6x
- frustrations 2x
- perfectionism 2x
- negativism 4x
- depression
- lying
- “never enough”
- performance anxiety and avoidance behavior 8x
- how to deal with dominant behavior 2x
- how to deal with stubborn and rebellious behavior and resistance 6x
- argumentative ways and how to avoid endless discussions 2x
- sibling rivalry – and how to deal with giftedness in relation to brothers and sisters 2x
- underachievement

How to help their child:

- build good social relationships 2x
- build resilience
- build perseverance
- deal with frustrations 4x
- deal with anxiety and fear
- to express himself in an acceptable manner
- deal with ‘boring’
- deal with losing in sports/games
- enhance self confidence 3x

- take responsibility 3x
- enhancing learning skills

Participants wanted to learn :

- to understand their child better 4x
- positive and supporting problem solving skills
- communication skills 2x
- how to be responsive without being too emotional
- where to set limits 2x ( e.g. doing homework)
- how to motivate their child 3x
- how to communicate with school about meeting the child's educational needs
- how to challenge their child without being pushy

## **Main effects of Positive discipline for the Gifted and Talented.**

### ***Parenting behavior after attending PDGT.***

After participating in PDGT the scores on the Parenting Scale decreased, meaning that the parent-reported dysfunctional behavior in discipline situations decreased. The Total sum score decreased ( $t=3.674$ ,  $p=.002$ ) as well as the subscales laxness ( $t=3.041$ ,  $p=.007$ ), overreactivity ( $t=3.102$ ,  $p=.006$ ) and verbosity ( $t=3.586$ ,  $p=.002$ ).

The mean scores were no longer in the clinical range (Arnold et al, 1993).

Prior to attending PDGT the Total mean score was above the clinical score. After attending PDGT the mean score on the total scale reduced to below the clinical group score ( $M=2.9$ ,  $SD=0.57$ ) but continued to be higher than the non-clinical group norm. Although the total dysfunctional parenting had decreased significantly, participants reported more dysfunctional parenting behavior than the non-clinical group.

Before PDGT participants displayed more anger in discipline situations than the clinical group. After attending PDGT the mean score on the subscale overreactivity ( $M=2.9$ ,  $SD=0.73$ ) was lower than the clinical group norms but higher than the normal group norm indicating that they displayed less anger than the clinical group but more than the non-clinical group.

On the subscale verbosity the mean score before the intervention ( $M=3.7$ ,  $SD=0.83$ ) was higher than the mean score of the clinical group. After attending PDGT the mean score decreased and was even lower than the non-clinical group norms ( $M=2.8$ ,  $SD=0.86$ ). This means that before attending PDGT participants used overly long reprimands and relied on talking more than the normal and the clinical group. After attending PDGT they succeeded in keeping discussions short.

The scores on the laxness scale indicate that the participants were more permissive than the non-clinical group but less than the clinical group. After attending PDGT participants were less permissive, similar to the non-clinical group.

Figure 2 displays the results on The Parenting Scale.

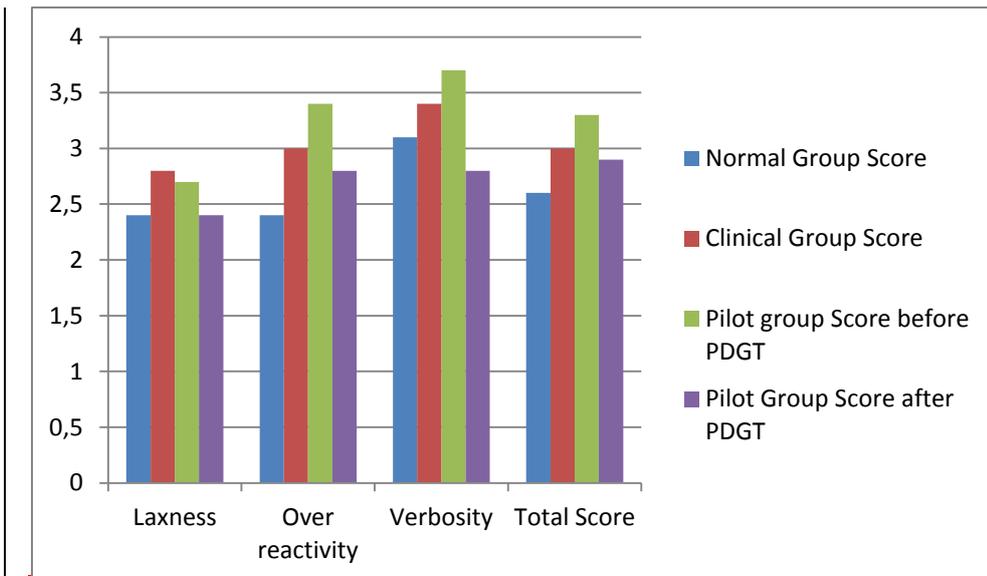


Figure 2: Mean Scores on The Parenting Scale; Pilot Scores before and after PDGT compared to the normal and clinical scores.

Parental stress, rated on the basis of NVOS decreased ( $t=4.652$ ,  $p=.035$ ).

After the intervention 26 % of the parents indicated feeling satisfied about their parenting skills and not needing help. 63 % of the parent were moderately positive about their parenting strategies but contemplated to seek advice for certain situations. The amount of parents experiencing significant up to serious parental problems declined from 42 % to 10 % of which only one parent still urgently needing help.

McVittie's questionnaire on authoritative parenting behavior showed significant improvement in three areas:

- Parents yelled less at their child ( $t=2.535$ ,  $p=.021$ )
- Parents felt more comfortable problem solving with their child ( $t=-2.3$ ,  $p=.031$ )
- parents decreased the use of bribery or rewards to get their child to do what they want ( $t=3.284$ ,  $p=.004$ )

An overview of the results of McVitties questionnaire is shown in figure 3.

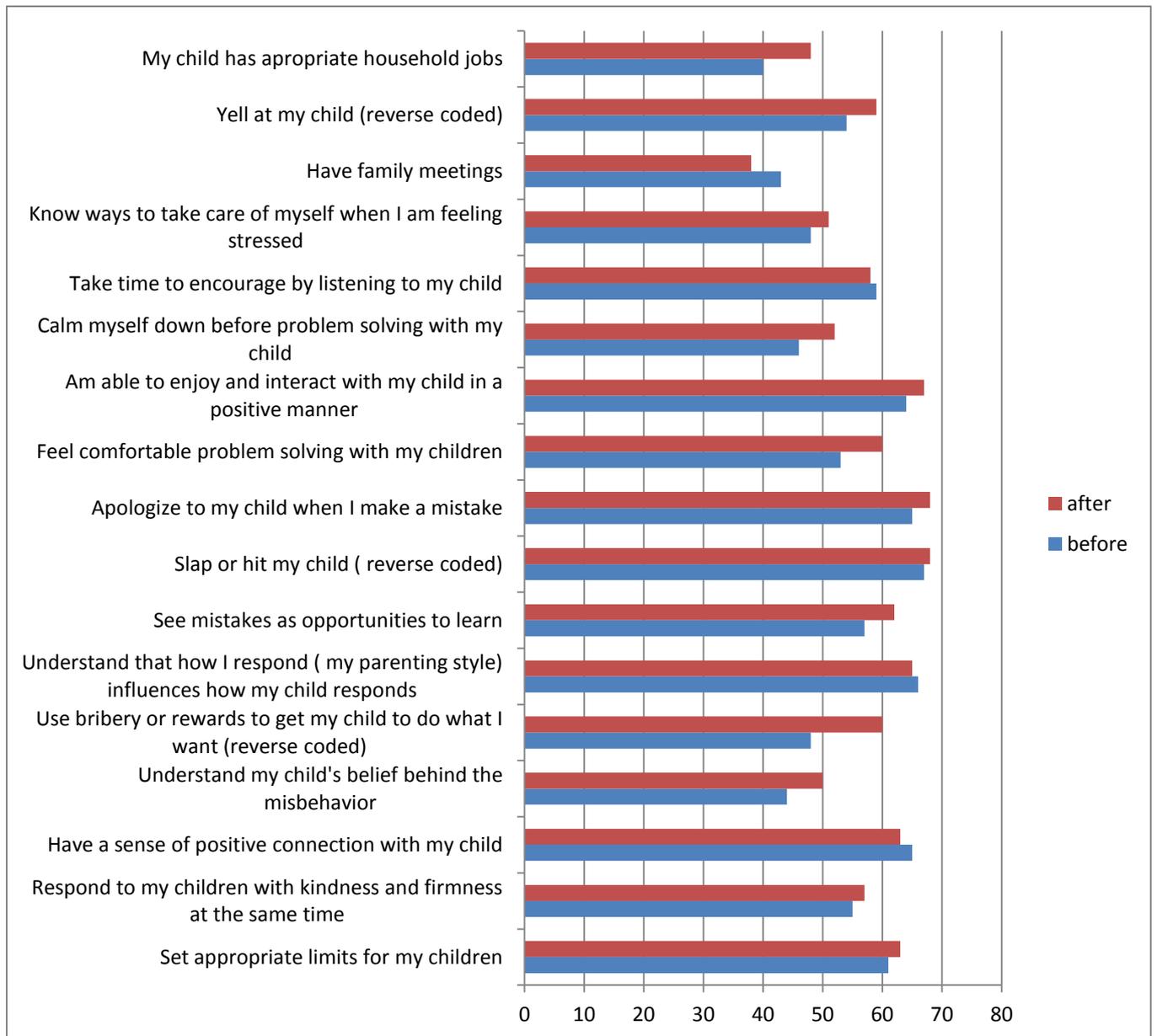


Figure 3. Results of McVittie's questionnaire. For each item, parents were asked how often they engaged in that particular behavior.

The following areas of change were reported frequently during the interviews:

Participants felt better equipped to empower their children and help them find their own way, instead of getting over-involved and taking over their children's responsibilities.

Second, participants mentioned positive experiences of stepping out of negative interactions. Before attending the training parents felt obliged to deal with negative situations immediately. The training helped them to first calm down and then handle an upsetting situation. Also participants indicated to intervene less but to express their trust that the children would be able to work things out for themselves instead.

Third, participants reported being more aware of the difference between encouragement and praise. They focused more on effort, perseverance and the process of learning than expressing praise for results or characteristics.

### *Child problem behavior after attending PDGT.*

After attending Positive Discipline for gifted and talented the mean scores on the SDQ were no longer above the normal range. Conduct problems decreased ( $t=2.28$ ,  $p=.035$ ), problems with peers decreased ( $t=2.8$ ,  $p=.012$ ) as well as the total difficulties ( $t=2.653$ ,  $p=.016$ ).

	Normal Score	Pilot Score before PDGT	Pilot Score after PDGT
Total Difficulties Score	0 - 13	14,6	11,9
Emotional Symptoms Score	0 - 3	4,1	3,1
Conduct Problems Score	0 - 2	3,3	2,3
Hyperactivity Score	0 - 5	3,9	3,9
Peer Problems Score	0 - 2	3,2	2,4
Prosocial Behavior Score	6 - 10	7,0	7,1

Table 2: SDQ mean scores; Pilot Scores before and after PDGT compared to the normal scores.

### *Meeting the specific needs of parents of gifted and talented children.*

Sixteen out of nineteen participants claim to be satisfied up to very satisfied about tailoring the training to the needs of gifted and talented children. One participant was neutral and two indicated they had wanted more information about the characteristics of gifted children. However it should be noticed that precisely these last two participants didn't attend the meeting that focused on this subject.

The two most valued topics were 'understanding misbehavior' and 'firm *and* kind parenting style'.

All participants appreciated 'understanding misbehavior' the topic as valuable or as very valuable.

In the questionnaire the majority (95%) of the participants indicated that learning about the authoritative parenting style ("kind and firm at the same time") had been valuable (42%) or very valuable (53%) to them. One participant was neutral. Nobody did not value this topic. This finding was confirmed by what was said during the interviews. Parents indicated that understanding the pitfalls of punishment and rewards and knowing alternative disciplining strategies had been an eye-opener to them. They valued the authoritative parenting style as an essential cornerstone for effective change.

Some parents reported to have succeeded in changing their authoritarian style to being more responsive and noticed that their children responded well. The children were said to be calmer and to fight less.

Other parents reported that they were able to set clearer expectations and had stopped discussing everything. Counter to what they expected before attending the training, they noticed that reducing the space for discussion had a calming effect. The children seemed to appreciate the clarity.

The topics "Intensity/over-excitabilities", "seeing mistakes (=misbehavior) as opportunities to learn", "calming down before problem-solving" and "dealing with sibling rivalry" were also valued highly. Seventy-four percent of the participants rated the topic as valuable or very valuable. During the interviews one participant mentioned that a lot of tension had been released after understanding

intensity as part of the nature of gifted children. Shifting attention from correcting intensity to redirecting intensity to expressing it in acceptable ways, had had a major impact within their family. He even enjoyed the characteristic now and enjoyed the process of finding ways to redirect intensity.

During the interviews 5 participants reported spontaneously, without being asked about the issue, that they appreciated being in a group with parents of gifted children who experience the same challenges. They felt supported and were relieved to finally meet people who understood immediately instead of having to explain at length and defend themselves.

One participant noted during the interview that the strong sense of justice common in gifted and talented children should have been addressed in more detail during the training.

Two participants reported during the interviews that they understood the theory and were aware of the positive effect of the tools but had a hard time putting it to practice. They felt overwhelmed by their children's needs, other obligations and time pressure and didn't really know where to start to implement the new style.

## 2.3 Discussion

The aim of the pilot was to examine whether attending "Positive Discipline for the gifted and talented was effective in improving encouraging parental behavior and authoritative disciplining skills, in enhancing feelings of satisfaction with family life and in reducing child problem behavior.

Results indicate that encouraging parental behavior has improved and that dysfunctional parenting behavior has decreased as well as parental stress and perceived child problems. However it is unclear whether the parenting behavior has become more authoritative.

The lack of clarity about the authoritativeness comes from the fact that the positively rated parenting behavior on the Parenting Scale not always matches the authoritative parenting style intended in the PDGT.

For example one item on the parenting scale is:

I threaten to do things that... I am sure I can carry out (1) - I know I won't actually do (7)

The item receives a 1-7 score, where 7 is the "ineffective" end. A high score on this item indicates laxness which represents the permissive parenting style. The difficulty is that that a low score indicating effective parenting in the parenting scale isn't an example of authoritative parenting.

Threatening is an authoritarian discipline style and this parenting strategy is discouraged in PDGT. A reduced dysfunctional score does not indicate a more authoritative parenting style, but in this case means a more authoritarian parenting style. The intention of PDGT was to help permissive parents to become more authoritative not authoritarian.

The overreactivity scale is said to measure the authoritarian parenting style but this is debatable. An example of items indicating overreactivity is:

I get so frustrated or angry that my child can see I'm upset – I handle it without getting upset.

Obviously 'handling it without getting upset' is better than getting frustrated and angry, but it doesn't mean it isn't handled in a less authoritarian way. For example it is possible to punish a child by withdrawing television time without the parent getting upset. This doesn't mean it was handled authoritatively. It is handled in an authoritarian way, but without overreactivity.

It is concluded that although the Parenting Scale does indicate the degree of dysfunctional parenting it offers no insight into the authoritative parenting style.

The hypothesis that three dysfunctional discipline styles: laxness (permissive discipline), overreactivity (authoritarian discipline, displays of anger), and verbosity (overly long reprimands or reliance on talking) would diminish after attending the program is confirmed.

The results show significantly reduced overreactivity. This finding is in accordance with the result indicating that participants yelled significantly less at their child after attending PDGT. PDGT did not reduce hitting their child, but it should be noted that prior to attending PDGT hardly any of the parents hit their child frequently, leaving not much room for reduction.

The permissive parenting style (laxness in the parenting Scale) was reduced significantly after attending PDGT. A reduced permissive style is in accordance with the result indicating that parents felt more comfortable problem solving with their child. Permissive parents avoid confrontation. It can be assumed that when parents feel more comfortable problem solving with their child, they feel better equipped to confront.

Participants have indicated that they wanted to learn communication skills and ways to deal with their children's argumentative ways and the lengthy discussions. The reduction of verbosity indicates that attending PDGT helped parents doing so. This was confirmed by the comments of participants who claimed to have reduced the space for discussions and had noticed the calming effect of more clarity.

Participants indicated using less rewards after attending the program. To practitioners of Positive Discipline this is a positive result. They distinguish between positive attention and rewards. When positive attention is used to deliberately change behavior it is also called reward. PDGT encourages positive attention but discourages the use of rewards. Rewards are seen as obedience-oriented and therefore as authoritarian. Rewards are believed to evoke resistance and resentment. Contrary to practitioners of Positive Discipline, practitioners of Triple P do see rewards as an example of positive authoritative discipline. More research is needed in order to understand whether rewards fit an authoritative parenting style or should be avoided.

Parental stress was expected to decrease and this was confirmed by the results.

It was hypothesized that after participating in PDGT children's problem behavior would decrease. This was partially confirmed by the results. Conduct problems and peer problems decreased. Hyperactivity and emotional problems were not found to be reduced. In contradiction to the expectation the score for hyperactivity wasn't above the normal norm scores, leaving little room to decrease.

### Meeting the needs of parents of gifted and talented children.

Although participants indicated in the questionnaires to be satisfied about the degree of tailoring, they did report to appreciate more information on the nature of giftedness. Therefore a shift of accent may better fit the needs of the parents. In the training the authoritative parenting style was taken as the basis. The tailoring to the needs of the gifted consisted of applying authoritative tools to specific situations commonly encountered by parents of gifted and talented children. It is expected that when taking the nature of giftedness as the starting point instead of the parenting style, the participants would feel better understood. Thus: moving from understanding the nature of

giftedness to understanding the need for authoritative parenting style instead of the other way round.

Participants differed greatly in the experienced amount of parental stress. Parents who felt overwhelmed and who experienced too much parental stress to implement the new parenting skills needed more support than PDGT provided. It is recommended in future PDGT to distinguish between different levels of support. Triple P does provide different levels of support and could be used as a good example.

### **Strengths and limitations**

Although the results of this study provide support for the efficacy of PDGT, caution is warranted in drawing this conclusion for several reasons.

First, the results only come from self-reported behavior on questionnaires and may be explained by the urge parents feel to see improvement, after significant investment of their time and energy in the intervention. The study did not provide in observations that could have underlined their rating. Further research is needed in which results are based not only on self-reported ratings on questionnaires but also consists of observations of parental behavior.

Second, there was no randomized controlled trial. It is possible that the dysfunctional parenting style and the perceived problem behavior of the children would also have been reduced without attending PDGT.

Third, the norm scores were determined in the USA and have not yet been validated in the Netherlands.

Fourth, the experimental group consisted of 19 participants. This is a very small sample.

Fifth, the experimental group consisted of both couples and individual parents. This blurs the interpretations of the results of the SDQ as some children were rated twice and some children once.

Arnold's Parenting Scale and The Strength and difficulties questionnaire are broadly used questionnaires. These questionnaires were used in this study in order to facilitate the comparison with other effect studies. The evaluation of Gifted and talented Triple P for example was also based on these questionnaires.

For future research another instrument is needed in order to gain insight in the degree of authoritative parenting.

Similar to Leijten's study into the effectiveness of a parent training program (Leijten 2012), also in this study the NVOS was used to measure parental stress. However, from Leijten's study it became apparent that the COTAN 1999 assessed the norms of the questionnaire as insufficient and that a stress score that was based on only one item couldn't be valued as a solid result. Too late for this study, but important for future research, Leijten recommends the use of the Nijmeegse Ouderlijke Stress Index (NSOI). This is the Dutch version of the international questionnaire PSI (parenting stress index).

### **Implications for research and practice.**

During this study it became apparent that authoritative parenting doesn't mean the same to everyone. Authoritative parenting is defined as the parenting styles in which demandingness and responsiveness come together. However, views differ in how this style is applied in practice. The

behavioral parenting intervention Triple P, and Adlerian-based Positive Discipline both are indicated to enhance the authoritative parenting style. However Triple P makes use of rewards and time-out whereas Adlerians on the other hand believe timeout and rewards to be authoritarian and discouraging.

Behavioral parenting intervention, including Triple P, has a long research history in which the efficacy of programs was demonstrated many times. The results of the evaluation of the efficacy of Gifted and talented Triple P also demonstrate that “parents find the intervention acceptable and helpful” (Morawska, 2009, p.170). In contrast there is a lack of research into the efficacy of Adlerian-based parenting. Though it’s tempting to follow the mainstream and focus only on behavioral parenting intervention there are reasons to believe that Adlerian-based parenting - without the use of punishment (time out) and rewards - is a better fit to the gifted and talented population.

This study deliberately choose an Adlerian-based authoritative parenting style as the basis for a tailored parenting intervention and is intended as a starting point to meet the needs of parents of gifted children. The results of this study into the efficacy of the program for parents of gifted and talented children are promising but come from a narrow basis. Research with a randomized controlled trial is needed on a bigger experimental group than was the case in this study. Not only should results come from questionnaires but also from observations in real life. And finally the measures used should gain a better insight in the authoritative parenting style than the questionnaires used in the present study.

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