

How to Choose the Right Parenting Program for You

By Linda Adams, Gordon Training International, 2008

When Dr. Gordon taught the first P.E.T. class in 1962, parent training was a brand-new idea. At that time, most parents felt that they didn't need training—that the way their parents had raised them was good enough. Still the idea caught on and in 1975, the New York Times called P.E.T. “a national movement.”

Now it's been a little more than 46 years to the day since that first P.E.T. course began. And so much has happened since that day. Like every new idea, P.E.T. attracted a lot of imitators. In addition, people with very different views about how parents should raise their children came on the scene. Today, there are literally hundreds and perhaps thousands of parent training books and courses. Clearly, it's an idea whose time has come.

Now, we know that parent training can have a major impact on how parents raise their children. There is overwhelming evidence that ineffective parenting is the cause of many of the problems that children and adolescents develop and struggle with throughout their lives. And we know that effective parenting can prevent many, if not most of these problems. In fact, it can do much more than that—effective parenting can create family relationships in which both parents and children can thrive.

With so many choices, how does a parent choose which model to follow?

Each model offers a specific philosophy of child-rearing and some offer skill training as well. There are several parent training models within which many parent training programs loosely fit. Most of them are based on the work of well-known and respected psychologists who have written books describing their theories. In most cases, their students and/or advocates developed courses for parents based on these theories.

Some of the courses advocate that parents be in control (autocratic), though the degree of control varies. Almost none advocate permissiveness. Some, like P.E.T., show parents how to have a collaborative, cooperative relationship with their children (democratic).

To help those parents faced with the daunting task of choosing a model, I have summarized the philosophy and skill training (if any) of some of the most well-known



531 Stevens Avenue West
Solana Beach
CA 92075 USA
Phone: 800.628.1197
858.481.8121
Fax: 858.481.8125
Email: info@gordontraining.com
Web: www.gordontraining.com

and/or current parenting models in an article, "How P.E.T. Compares to Other Parent Training Programs."

How P.E.T. Compares to Other Parenting Programs

Programs Included in this comparison:

Parent Effectiveness Training (P.E.T.)
Nonviolent Communication (N.V.C.)
How to Talk so Kids Will Listen and Listen so Kids Will Talk
Systematic Training for Effective Parenting (S.T.E.P.)
Active Parenting
Love and Logic
Triple P (Positive Parenting Program)
Dare to Discipline

Parent Effectiveness Training (P.E.T.)

Author: Dr. Thomas Gordon

Philosophy: Democratic

Applies to All Relationships: Yes

Year of Origin: 1962

Book: Parent Effectiveness Training (P.E.T.), 1970, 2000.

Course: Parent Effectiveness Training (P.E.T.), 1962, 1976, 1989, 2005.

Course Length: Eight 3-hour sessions

Summary of this Model:

This book and course offer a philosophy and set of communication and conflict resolution skills for helping parents develop and maintain a democratic, mutually satisfying relationships with their children and with each other. The conceptual model is the Behavior Window, a framework that Dr. Gordon developed for determining who owns the problem. Parents learn to use this window to help them to decide which skill to use depending on whose problem it is. There is heavy emphasis on learning the communication and conflict resolution skills so they can be used right away, both at home and in all relationships.

Main Concepts and Skills of this Model:

- Three types of parenting styles: Authoritarian, Permissive, Democratic
- Focus is on teaching the Democratic style
- No use of parental power; needs of both parent and child important; conflicts solved so both get their needs met
- Training is needed to learn any new skill
- Behavior Window provides a framework for dealing with all behaviors
- Problem Ownership
- Communication and Conflict Resolution skills to handle any relationship problem
- Acceptance of child as s/he is
- Acceptance demonstrated through Active Listening
- 12 Communication Roadblocks
- “Misbehavior” is the language of power
- Authentic, congruent expression of true feelings without blame
- Avoidance of labels and judgments
- Anger and what’s beneath it
- I-Messages vs. You-Messages
- Shifting gears to deal with resistance to I-Message
- Modifying the physical environment to prevent problems and conflicts
- Harmful effects of both rewards and punishments, including logical consequences and time-out
- Disadvantages of both strict and permissive parenting styles
- Win-lose conflict resolution methods as compared with the No-Lose Method
- Parents use influence, not control
- Family rule-setting; Principle of Participation
- Conflicts resolved so that the needs of both parent and child are important and both are satisfied with the solution; no one loses
- How to handle values differences through modeling, consulting, I-Messages.

Nonviolent Communication (N.V.C.)

Author: Dr. Marshall Rosenberg

Philosophy: Democratic

Applies to All Relationships: Yes

Year of Origin: 1975

Book: Nonviolent Communication: The Language of Life, 2003

Course: Nonviolent Communication

Course Length: 13 2/12hour sessions

Summary of this Model:

This book and course offers a philosophy for having more meaningful, deeper connections with children, other people and oneself. It focuses on needs—one's own and those of the other person and makes a case for learning to communicate in ways that create harmony and peace between people instead of arguments, misunderstandings and even violence. And it demonstrates the attitudes and skills that are needed to have such relationships both in the family and with others.

Main Concepts and Skills of this Model:

- Observing behavior without evaluation
- Identifying and expressing feelings and needs without judging
- Taking responsibility for one's feelings
- Receiving other's communication empathically
- Reflecting back other's feelings
- Self-counseling
- Avoiding self-judgment
- Expressing anger by connecting it with unmet needs
- Harmful effects of punishments and rewards
- Expressing appreciation vs. praise

P.E.T. as compared with N.V.C.

N.V.C. and P.E.T. are grounded in the same philosophy. They have quite different ways of presenting their models. Both Thomas Gordon and Marshall Rosenberg were students of Carl Rogers.

How to Talk so Kids Will Listen and Listen so Kids Will Talk

Authors: Elaine Mazlich and Adele Faber

Philosophy: Democratic

Applies to All Relationships: Yes

Year of Origin: 1980

Book: How to Talk so Kids Will Listen and Listen so Kids Will Talk, 1980

Course: How to Talk so Kids Will Listen and Listen so Kids Will Talk

Course Length: Six sessions, six 30-minute videos or audios.

Summary of this Model:

This book and course offer parents empathic listening skills, authentic self-disclosure and problem-solving skills for raising children with high self-esteem and autonomy. It focuses on helping a child view him/herself differently by letting go of old ineffective roles or labels and as a result have freedom to develop and change.

Main Concepts and Skills of this Model:

- Helping children deal with negative feelings
- Accepting and acknowledging children's feelings
- Avoiding typical unhelpful ways to get children to cooperate
- Gaining cooperation by being congruent (describe the problem, express feelings)
- Instead of punishment, expressing feelings, stating expectations, telling child how to make amends, giving choices, taking action, problem solving
- Setting boundaries and limits.
- Encouraging autonomy by helping children function on their own
- Praising children by describing their behavior, not evaluating it.
- Avoiding labeling, allowing freedom for children to develop and change

P.E.T. as compared with How to Listen so Kids Will Talk.....

This model is based on the work of Dr. Haim Ginott (a student of Carl Rogers) and has a philosophy with some similarities to P.E.T.

Systematic Training for Effective Parenting (S.T.E.P.)

Authors: Dr. Don Dinkmeyer and Dr. Gary McKay

Philosophy: Democratic

Applies to all Relationships: No

Year of Origin: 1976

Book: The Parent's Handbook: Systematic Training for Effective Parenting (S.T.E.P.), 1997

Course: Systematic Training for Effective Parenting (S.T.E.P.)

Course Length: Nine 2-hour sessions

Summary of this Model:

This book and course focus on how children grow and behave, on misbehavior and effective ways to deal with it, on the importance of encouraging children and how to do that effectively, on listening to children with empathy and talking to them authentically. It deals with both Natural and Logical Consequences as alternatives to rewards and punishments in disciplining children. (Natural Consequences are those which occur naturally. Logical Consequences are those created by a parent in response to a child's misbehavior.) It advocates family meetings (to plan for fun, to express feelings, to make decisions, to resolve conflicts).

Main Concepts and Skills of this Model:

- Three types of parents: Authoritarian, Permissive, Democratic
- Focus is on teaching the Democratic style
- Democratic style helps children become responsible by setting limits and giving choices within those limits
- Why children misbehave
- How to deal with misbehavior
- Setting limits
- Giving encouragement instead of praise
- Reflective listening
- Messages vs. You-Messages
- Problem Ownership
- Problem-Solving
- Family Meetings
- Giving choices
- Disadvantages of punishment
- Applying Logical Consequences as a way to discipline
- Logical Consequences different than Punishment



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P.E.T. as compared with S.T.E.P.

S.T.E.P.'s focus is on why children misbehave and how parents can deal with misbehavior effectively. The S.T.E.P. program offers many of the P.E.T. skills in a shorter version including Problem Ownership, Active Listening, I-Messages, Problem Solving. While both programs are opposed to the use of rewards and punishments as a way of disciplining children, S.T.E.P. advocates the use of Logical Consequences. In the P.E.T. philosophy, Logical Consequences are a form of punishment. S.T.E.P. is a combination of parenting methods based on the work of Alfred Adler/Rudolf Dreikurs and Thomas Gordon.

Active Parenting

Author: Dr. Michael Popkin

Philosophy: Democratic

Applies to All Relationships: No

Date of Origin: 1983

Book: Active Parenting Now, 2002

Course: Active Parenting

Course Length: Six 2-hour sessions

Summary of this Model:

This video-based program is very similar to S.T.E.P., i.e. its foundation is based on the work of Alfred Adler and Rudolf Dreikurs and it includes a major component of P.E.T. ideas and skills in an abbreviated form.

Main Concepts and Skills of this Model:

- Three types of parents: The Doormat, The Dictator, The Active Parent
- The Active Parenting style is described as “freedom within limits” (see S.T.E.P. above for other concepts and skills)

P.E.T. as compared with Active Parenting

(see S.T.E.P. above)

Love and Logic

Authors: Dr. Foster Cline and Jim Fay

Philosophy: Autocratic

Applies to all Relationships: No

Year of Origin: 1980

Book: Parenting with Love and Logic, 1990, 2006

Course: Love and Logic

Course Length: Six modules

Summary of this Model:

This book contains two parts, the first of which explains the authors' parenting philosophy. The focus is on teaching children to be responsible by setting limits, giving choices and encouraging the child to think for him/herself. The other part of the book deals with common discipline problems and how to handle them. These 48 "pearls" give parents advice on what to do about such issues as: "allowances, anger, bedtime, bossiness, church, discipline 101, homework, nasty looks and negative body language, pacifiers, sassiness and disrespect, spanking, temper tantrums, toilet training".

Main Concepts and Skills of This Model:

- Three types of parents: Helicopter, Drill Sergeant and Consultant
- Consultant parent is the Love and Logic type: one who gives thoughtful guidance and imposes firm, enforceable limits
- Parents in control
- Problem ownership
- Setting limits by describing what parent will do or will allow
- Applying enforceable statements ("either...or...")
- Using empathy to help children learn from consequences of their behavior
- Importance of child having positive self-concept
- Encouraging instead of praising
- Encouraging children to think for themselves
- Logical Consequences and time-out as methods of discipline when children misbehave
- Differences between Logical Consequences and punishment



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P.E.T. as compared with Love and Logic

The Love and Logic model advocates that parents use their power to get children to obey, i.e., “healthy control”. It is based on the belief that this kind of discipline will teach children responsibility. P.E.T. is a model which advocates that parents not use their power to control their children. Instead, it advocates the use of communication and conflict resolution skills to influence children and empower them to become self-reliant, make positive decisions and control their own behavior.

Triple P (Positive Parenting Program)

Author: Dr. Matthew Sanders

Philosophy: Autocratic

Applies to All Relationships: No

Year of Origin: 1992

Book: Every Parent: A positive approach to children's behaviour, 2004

Course: Triple P (Positive Parenting Program)

Course Length: Three 1 ½-hour sessions and other formats

Summary of this Model:

This book and course offers the concept of Constructive Parenting and defines that as a way of raising children to help them become socially and emotionally competent. Parents are in control; they set the rules and enforce them. How to deal with misbehavior is a main focus. The book contains chapters with age-specific advice on how to deal with such behaviors as crying, whining, temper tantrums, disobedience, interrupting, sleeping and bedtime problems, swearing and chores.

Main Concepts and Skills of This Model:

- Helping parents learn to teach children self-control, how to follow rules, behave acceptably and respect others
- Creating a safe, secure, engaging environment, i.e. interesting, amusing, purposeful activities
- Fostering a positive learning environment, i.e. giving recognition, encouragement, acknowledgment
- Using assertive discipline; dealing with disobedience and misbehavior
- Parents deal with misbehavior quickly, decisively and consistently
- Applying appropriate Logical Consequences so that children learn to accept responsibility for their own behavior
- Difference between assertive discipline and punishment
- Using rewards and praise (when children "behave")
- Making behavior charts
- Parents set rules; enforce them
- Taking care of self as a parent, i.e., eating well, getting enough exercise and sleep, etc.



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P.E.T. as compared with Triple P

The Triple P model advocates the idea that parents exercise control over their children, expect obedience and apply discipline when children misbehave. P.E.T. views the parent/child relationship from a different frame a reference and teaches parents how to have collaborative, cooperative relationships with their children. It teaches a non-power method of raising children and offers skills of empathic listening, honest, clear and non-blameful self-disclosure and conflict resolution skills.

Dare to Discipline

Author: Dr. James Dobson

Philosophy: Autocratic

Applies to All Relationships: No

Year of Origin: 1970

Books: Dare to Discipline, 1970, 1996, The Strong-Willed Child, 2004
The Strong-Willed Child Workbook, 2005

Course: Unknown

Course Length: Unknown

Summary of this Model:

This model is based on the idea that parents need to begin teaching respect for authority starting when children are very young. The main job of parents is to teach their children to obey. When they are “defiant” and don’t obey, parents should punish the disobedient child by spanking him/her. After such confrontation in which the parent has demonstrated his/her right to lead, it’s important to explain to the child why s/he was disciplined and to let the child know how much the parent loves him/her.

Main Concepts and Skills of this Model:

- Parents’ job is to shape the child’s will without breaking the spirit
- Parents in control; expect children to be obedient
- Children are willfully defiant
- Immediate proper response (punitive discipline) required when they’re defiant
- Compliant child is the goal
- Encourage normal curiosity; valuable means for learning
- Difference between crushing the will of a child and teaching the child to rein it in for his/her own good
- Logical Consequences
- Love and control present in balanced proportions.
- Anger is an ineffective tool
- Physical punishment

P.E.T. as compared with Dare to Discipline

Dare to Discipline comes from the point of view that the parent/child relationship is a contest of wills and that the parent must always win at all costs. It is imperative that a child be taught to obey. Dobson advocates the use of corporal punishment as the way



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Web: www.gordontraining.com

of dealing with “defiance” and disobedience. This is the only model in this comparison that advocates physical punishment. P.E.T. shows parents how to have a relationship with their children that is based on mutual respect as opposed to obedience. It offers evidence about the harmful effects of punishment on children and on the relationship between parent and child. And it offers communication and conflict resolutions skills that make punishment (and rewards) unnecessary.