

Time, Technology, and Social Pressure: Positive Discipline in Contemporary Family Life

Briseida ANDONI, PhD

Etleva HAXHIHYSENI, PhD

Abstract

In the context of modern parenting, the application of positive discipline faces numerous challenges that hinder its consistent and effective implementation. This mini-study explored parents' knowledge, attitudes, and practices related to positive discipline, aiming to identify factors that either facilitate or obstruct its use in daily life. The research focused on three key barriers affecting parents' ability to foster healthy educational relationships with their children: lack of time, the influence of technology, and social pressure. A semi-structured questionnaire was administered to a random sample of 110 employed parents aged 30–45 years, each with one or more children aged 3–6 years, residing in Tirana. Using a mixed-methods approach combining quantitative and qualitative analysis, the study examined parental perceptions of stress, parenting styles, the impact of technology, and children's adaptive behavior within the constraints of limited time. The findings reveal a gradual shift away from authoritarian parenting styles, ongoing challenges in managing children's technology use, and increasing parental stress due to time pressure. Most participants reported seeking parenting support primarily through the internet—especially social media—rather than consulting educational professionals. These results highlight the urgent need for targeted, expert-led training programs to enhance young parents' skills in applying positive discipline and promoting children's healthy emotional development.

Keywords: *positive discipline, modern parenting, technology, time constraints, social pressure, emotional education*

Introduction

Amid rapid social and technological transformations, positive parenting and positive discipline have become central to contemporary discussions on education and child development. Rooted in the principles of positive psychology, these approaches emphasize the cultivation of emotional competencies, mutual respect, and cooperative learning—rather than punishment or authoritarian control (Nelsen, Erwin, & Duffy, 2013; Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000). Within this framework, positive education represents the practical application of these values within both families and educational institutions, aiming to raise children who are self-aware, empathetic, and responsible (Gottfredson, 2021).

This study explores how three interrelated factors—time constraints, the influence of technology, and social pressure—affect parents’ ability to establish and maintain healthy educational relationships with their children. Understanding these dynamics is crucial to supporting parents as they navigate the growing complexity of modern family life.

Parenting is a continuous and evolving process, shaped by daily experiences, reflection, and interaction within a broader social and cultural context. Parental identity develops through this lived experience, simultaneously shaping and transforming the individual self in a process of reciprocal growth. However, parenting today differs markedly from the models that shaped previous generations. Many parents question the effectiveness of the disciplinary strategies used during their own upbringing and often face criticism from older generations who view modern approaches as too permissive. Statements such as “a child needs a slap” or “you were spanked, and you turned out fine” reflect lingering cultural attitudes that valorize punitive discipline.

Young parents today frequently find themselves caught between the internal pressure to parent differently and the external expectations imposed by family traditions and societal norms. This tension often leads to uncertainty in making consistent and informed parenting choices.

According to Gadeau (2019), positive education seeks to establish a more horizontal relationship between parent and child—one grounded in partnership, dialogue, and flexible boundaries—replacing the traditional model of authority. This shift represents a profound change in how educational relationships are understood within modern parenting. Children, as active and developing beings, naturally express curiosity, independence, and a desire to test limits—tendencies that can sometimes conflict with parental expectations and disciplinary approaches. Understanding and managing these dynamics through empathy, communication, and mutual respect lies at the heart of positive discipline.

Aim of study

To explore Albanian parents' knowledge, attitudes, and practices regarding positive discipline, and to identify the internal and external factors that facilitate or hinder its consistent implementation in everyday parenting.

Objectives

- To assess parents' understanding and perceptions of the concept of positive discipline.
- To examine the daily disciplinary practices used by parents and their alignment with positive discipline principles.
- To identify emotional, social, and technological challenges that affect the application of positive discipline.
- To analyze parents' emotional self-regulation and its role in maintaining respectful and constructive communication with children.
- To investigate parents' attitudes toward technology and its impact on parent–child interaction and discipline.
- To evaluate the need for parental support, training, and collaboration with educational institutions.

Literature Review

The concept of positive discipline originates from Alfred Adler's individual psychology, which views human behavior as driven by the fundamental need for belonging, significance, and connection with others. According to Adler, misbehavior often reflects an individual's attempt to find a sense of belonging within a social group. His student Rudolf Dreikurs expanded this theory by identifying four primary goals underlying children's misbehavior—attention-seeking, power, revenge, and avoidance—each linked to a child's perception of social inclusion or exclusion.

Dreikurs (1957) advocated for the use of natural and logical consequences instead of punishment, viewing discipline as an educational process that promotes cooperation, responsibility, and moral development. Encouragement, rather than fear or external rewards, was considered the cornerstone of discipline, as it fosters self-regulation and a sense of competence. Calm and respectful parental responses to children's mistakes preserve emotional connection and build trust—values that remain at the core of positive discipline today.

Building on Adlerian principles, positive discipline has evolved into an approach that promotes learning through relationships based on mutual respect and collaboration, rejecting punitive or authoritarian control. Positive parenting extends this philosophy to everyday family life, guiding education through love, clear boundaries, and emotional support. As Gadeau (2021) explains, positive education assumes that children are capable of understanding the reasons behind their behavior and can make rational decisions to change it. This approach emphasizes moral reasoning, where children learn from the natural outcomes of their actions rather than through imposed punishment.

The emergence of positive psychology, introduced by Seligman and Csikszentmihalyi (2000), reinforced these ideas by shifting attention from correcting deficits to cultivating personal strengths, virtues, and well-being. Within this framework, programs such as Triple P – Positive Parenting Program (Sanders, 2012) translate positive psychology principles into practical parenting strategies aimed at enhancing emotional communication and reducing coercive discipline. From this perspective, positive discipline integrates warmth and structure, seeing discipline as a guiding process that fosters self-control, empathy, and cooperation (Nelsen, 2006; Nelson, Erwin, & Duffy, 2015).

Despite its advantages, implementing positive discipline in modern family life presents significant challenges. The fast pace of daily life, combined with professional obligations and limited family time, often prevents parents from maintaining the patience and emotional availability required for this approach (Sege & Siegel, 2018). Parents frequently report feelings of guilt or inadequacy when unable to meet their own expectations, which can result in inconsistent boundaries or excessive permissiveness (Coyne & White, 2020). As a result, positive discipline sometimes risks becoming a theoretical ideal rather than a consistent practice.

Technology as a Contextual Factor in Modern Parenting

In addition to time and social pressures, the presence of technology has become a defining feature of contemporary parenting. While digital tools offer educational benefits, they also introduce new challenges for parents attempting to sustain emotional engagement with their children. Research suggests that excessive screen exposure in early childhood is associated with difficulties in self-regulation, attention, and language development (Fitzpatrick et al., 2024; Leung et al., 2025). The use of screens as a means of distraction or comfort may reduce opportunities for face-to-face interaction, an essential component of emotional learning and secure attachment.

Nonetheless, technology is not inherently detrimental; its impact depends largely on how it is integrated within family routines. Nelsen (2021), in *Help! My*

Child Is Addicted to Screens (Yikes! So Am I!), recommends applying positive discipline principles to digital contexts through collaborative family practices—such as holding regular meetings to set shared rules, designating “screen-free meals,” and scheduling special parent–child time. These strategies emphasize connection and communication rather than control, ensuring that digital boundaries remain relational rather than punitive.

A recent systematic review (2025) on children under five reinforces this relational view, showing that parental modeling, self-efficacy, and knowledge are key factors influencing children’s screen habits. In families where parents demonstrate mindful media use and prioritize interaction, children tend to exhibit lower screen time and better emotional regulation. Thus, technology management becomes one dimension of modern positive discipline, requiring parents to balance digital engagement with opportunities for real-world connection.

Adapting Positive Discipline to Contemporary Realities

Given these interrelated challenges—limited time, social expectations, and the digital environment—modern parenting calls for a flexible and realistic understanding of positive discipline. Gadeau (2021) warns against perfectionism, noting that the pressure to apply positive discipline flawlessly can lead to stress and guilt, undermining emotional connection. Instead, he advocates for an authentic approach, where parents strive to remain present, empathetic, and consistent within the constraints of everyday life.

In this view, positive discipline should not be seen as a rigid formula but as a dynamic framework adaptable to the changing conditions of family life. When practiced with awareness and compassion, it enables parents to nurture emotional intelligence, mutual respect, and self-discipline in their children—skills that are increasingly vital in today’s rapidly changing, technology-mediated world.

Methodology

Research Design

This study adopted a mixed-methods design, integrating both quantitative and qualitative approaches to obtain a comprehensive understanding of parents’ knowledge, attitudes, and practices regarding positive discipline. A semi-structured questionnaire served as the primary data-collection instrument and was distributed electronically via Google Forms.

Participants

The target population consisted of parents whose children were enrolled in public and private early education programs within the city of Tirana ($N = 110$). Eligibility required participants to be the parent of at least one child aged 3 to 6 years. The sample reflected diversity in gender, socioeconomic status, and educational background, ensuring representation of a wide range of parenting experiences and perspectives.

Data Collection Instruments

The semi-structured questionnaire included both closed- and open-ended items designed to capture demographic information, familiarity with positive discipline, perceived challenges, and sources of parenting support. The online format facilitated accessibility and confidentiality for participants.

Data Analysis

Quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive statistics (frequencies and percentages) to evaluate parents' familiarity with the principles and application of positive discipline.

For the qualitative component, a thematic analysis was conducted in accordance with the six-phase framework proposed by Braun and Clarke (2006). This method enabled the identification of recurring patterns, meanings, and shared attitudes within participants' narrative responses. Data were manually coded and organized into themes and subthemes that reflected common experiences, challenges, and perceptions regarding the implementation of positive discipline in everyday parenting practices.

Integration of Methods

Combining quantitative and qualitative data provided both measurable insights and a deeper interpretive understanding of how parents perceive and apply positive discipline within the context of modern family life. This methodological triangulation enhanced the validity and richness of the findings by linking statistical trends with parents' lived experiences.

Results

Data analysis was conducted based on parents' responses to the questionnaire and semi-structured interviews. The processed material revealed several key themes related to parents' knowledge, practices, challenges, and needs concerning positive discipline.

Knowledge and Perceptions of Positive Discipline

The majority of parents (66.7%) reported having heard of the concept of positive discipline, while 30.6% had not, and 2.8% were unsure. This indicates growing awareness, although understanding often remains general and lacks a structured theoretical foundation. Most parents perceive positive discipline as an educational approach rooted in love, respect, and nonviolence. They define it as “education through respect, love, and without violence,” “teaching responsibility and self-discipline,” or “emotional support and open communication.” Their statements emphasize a desire to set boundaries without physical, verbal, or psychological punishment, striving instead to engage through dialogue: “Discipline by setting behavioral boundaries and rules through constant communication and interaction. Physical and psychological violence is completely useless.” However, the analysis suggests that these insights are primarily acquired through independent sources such as social media, rather than formal training or education.

Daily Disciplinary Practices

Interview analysis revealed that communication is the most frequently mentioned disciplinary tool. Terms such as “dialogue,” “explanation,” “conversation,” and “appropriate language” appear consistently, reflecting the importance parents place on emotional connection and verbal engagement with their children. “I use a calm tone of voice to convey the seriousness of the conversation.” “I usually count to three to give my 4-year-old son time to prepare.” Parents aim to avoid confrontation and punishment, using communication to help children understand their behavior and its consequences. Many report using positive reinforcement and logical consequences: “Of course I reward good behavior.” “In case of misbehavior, I connect cause and consequence, e.g., removing a desired item.” In some cases, “good behavior” is tied to high expectations, which may create emotional pressure for the child. Nevertheless, the overarching goal remains the development of responsibility and awareness, rather than blind obedience.

Emotional Sensitivity and Parental Self-Regulation

Another theme explored was emotional self-regulation. Parents emphasized efforts to remain calm, avoid raising their voices, and support children in managing emotions: “I try to help him regulate his emotions by encouraging verbal expression and providing a safe space where he knows I’m present. This reflects a consistent effort to model calm and mindful behavior. However, many parents acknowledged that this requires significant effort, especially when feeling tired or overwhelmed.

Boundaries and Exceptional Cases

In isolated instances, parents mentioned minimal physical interventions, such as a light tap on the hand, in situations involving safety risks. These actions were described not as punishment but as protective measures: “Only in very serious cases, when there’s danger, I’ve grabbed his hand firmly to stop him. This indicates that parents are aware of the moral boundaries of positive parenting but may react instinctively in extreme situations to protect their child.

Challenges in Implementing Positive Discipline

Interviews revealed several key obstacles that hinder the consistent application of positive discipline: Emotional and physical exhaustion: Parents feel tired, lacking time and patience. “Patience is the biggest challenge. It gets harder when children don’t listen immediately. Impact of technology: Most parents view technology as a serious barrier: “It’s the main object making discipline impossible today.” “It creates dependency and aggression; it’s not easy to control.” Parental inconsistency and generational influence: Young parents noted discrepancies between themselves and pressure from extended family: “It’s often confused with not saying ‘No’ to the child. Inherited models make consistency difficult.” Creating a realistic worldview: Some parents worry that overly positive approaches may foster unrealistic expectations: “Maybe we’re teaching children about a world that isn’t real, because life isn’t always gentle.”

Attitudes Toward Technology

Two distinct perspectives emerged: Critical stance: Most parents see technology as a disruptive factor for discipline, focus, and family interaction. Flexible stance: A smaller group views technology as an unavoidable reality that must be managed: “My child lives in a time when these things exist, and I don’t see the need to deprive him—though with limited screen time.”

Need for Parental Support

Fewer than 50% of parents had participated in any form of professional training or counseling. Many expressed the need for practical training, concrete advice, and emotional support: “We need concrete examples, not just general advice. We want to know how to apply it in real situations.”

Mothers also called for greater involvement from fathers, the creation of support groups, and closer collaboration with educational institutions and professionals.

Discussion

The results indicate that Albanian parents are generally open and receptive to the philosophy of positive discipline. They demonstrate a clear awareness of the importance of communication, respect, and positive reinforcement, yet often feel unprepared to implement this approach consistently. Understanding of positive discipline tends to be emotional and intuitive rather than grounded in theoretical frameworks. This suggests that the concept has been internalized through experience rather than formal education. Nevertheless, parents express a strong desire to improve their relationships with their children and to avoid punitive methods.

The disciplinary practices reported reflect a shift toward communication and dialogue, where words replace punishment. Discipline is viewed as a collaborative process rather than an act of imposition. This approach fosters a sense of responsibility and mutual respect, helping children understand boundaries through explanation and logical consequences rather than fear.

However, the findings also highlight significant challenges that affect the consistent application of positive discipline. Daily stress, time constraints, excessive use of technology, and discrepancies between parenting partners hinder the sustainability of this approach. Parents recognize the value of calm and empathetic communication but often struggle to maintain such behavior during moments of tension.

Additionally, some parents express uncertainty about the boundaries of positive discipline, fearing that an overly gentle approach may lead to a lack of authority. This underscores the need for clarification and practical guidance to ensure that positive discipline is understood as a balance between structure and warmth, rather than an absence of rules.

From a social perspective, the findings point to the need for supportive policies on parental education, training programs, and stronger collaboration between families, schools, and institutions. Parents are eager to learn and grow, but they lack the tools and resources necessary to do so in a sustainable way.

Focus on interpersonal relationships and social skills parents can create opportunities to foster social skills through games and activities that promote cooperation and communication.

Conclusions

Albanian parents show openness and a generally positive attitude toward the philosophy of positive discipline, valuing communication, respect, and emotional support.

While many parents are familiar with the concept, their understanding is often intuitive and emotionally driven rather than grounded in formal theoretical knowledge.

Parents strive to replace punitive methods with dialogue and logical consequences, aiming to foster responsibility and mutual respect.

The consistent application of positive discipline is challenged by emotional fatigue, time constraints, technological distractions, and intergenerational differences in parenting styles.

There is a clear need for practical guidance, training programs, and institutional support to help parents implement positive discipline effectively.

Emotional presence, patience, and collaborative parent–child relationships are essential competencies for successful positive parenting, yet they remain among the most difficult to sustain in modern family life.

Ultimately, a gentle, humane, and sustainable approach is needed—one in which communication, love, and emotional presence form the foundation of every effort toward the positive education of children.

In main conclusion, patience, emotional self-regulation, and parent–child collaboration emerge as essential competencies for the successful implementation of positive discipline. These elements represent not only the foundation of healthy parenting but also the most pressing challenges in contemporary parental life.

Recommendations

Training Programs on Positive Discipline Structured training initiatives can serve as promising strategies to address the challenges posed by technology and support parents in applying positive discipline effectively.

Establishing Clear and Consistent Boundaries for Technology Use Limiting screen time and setting firm boundaries helps children develop self-regulation and prioritize social and educational activities.

Modeling Healthy Technology Behavior Parents should exemplify balanced and mindful use of digital devices to reinforce healthy habits in their children.

Engaging in Offline Activities Participation in peer play, reading, and sports can strengthen emotional bonds and support holistic child development beyond screen-based interaction.

References

- Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2006). *Using thematic analysis in psychology. Qualitative Research in Psychology, 3*(2), 77–101. <https://doi.org/10.1191/1478088706qp0630a>
- Coyne, S. M., & White, A. (2020). Parenting in the digital age: Balancing connection and discipline. *Journal of Child and Family Studies*.
- Dreikurs, R. (1991). *Children: The challenge*. New York, NY: Plume; Penguin Group.
- Fitzpatrick, C., et al. (2024). Screen time and early childhood development: Emotional and behavioral implications. *Child Development Research*.
- Fitzpatrick, C., Bérubé, A., & Pagani, L. (2024). Early digital exposure and child self-regulation: A longitudinal perspective. *Journal of Child Psychology and Psychiatry, 65*(2), 345–359.
- Gadeau, L. (2021). *La parentalité positive à l'épreuve de la vraie vie*. Bruxelles: yapaka.be..
- Gottfredson, L. (2021). Positive education: Integrating positive psychology and educational practice. *Journal of Positive Psychology in Education, 45–59*.
- Leung, C., et al. (2025). Digital devices and emotion regulation in early childhood. *Journal of Developmental Psychology*.
- Liu, J., Liu, X., & Ding, M. (2024). The impact of a positive discipline group intervention on parenting self-efficacy among mothers of young children. *Frontiers in Public Health, 12*. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpubh.2024.1461435>
- Nelsen, J. (2006). *Positive discipline: The classic guide to helping children develop self-discipline, responsibility, cooperation, and problem-solving skills*. New York, NY: Ballantine Books.
- Nelson, J., Erwin, C., & Duffy, A. R. (2015). *Positive discipline: The first three years (Rev. ed.): From infant to toddler—Laying the foundation for raising a capable, confident child*. California, U.S.: Harmony.
- Nelsen, J. (2021). *Help! My child is addicted to screens (Yikes! So am I!): Positive discipline tools for managing family screen time*. Harmony.
- Pyne, B., Asmara, o., Morawska, A. (2025). The Impact of Modifiable Parenting Factors on the Screen Use of Children Five Years or Younger: A Systematic Review. *Clinical Child and Family Psychology Review, 28*:458–490, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10567-025-00523-9>
- Romano, E. (2023). *New study: Positive discipline helps parents move away from punishment*. University of Ottawa – School of Psychology. <https://www.uottawa.ca/en/news-all/new-study-positive-discipline-helps-parents-move-away-punishment>
- Sanders, M. R. (2012). Development, evaluation, and multinational dissemination of the Triple P–Positive Parenting Program. *Annual Review of Clinical Psychology, 8*, 345–379.
- Seligman, M. E. P., & Csikszentmihalyi, M. (2000). Positive psychology: An introduction. *American Psychologist, 55*(1), 5–14.