

Parent Effectiveness Training Summary of Australian Research—1980-2004

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Rob, M., & Norfor, J. (1980). Parenting: Can skills be learned? *Australian Journal of Social Issues*, 15, 3, 189-193.

Rob and Norfor (1980) compared the outcomes of PET participants with population norms on the same measures and found that parents who had completed PET showed greater confidence in their ability as parents, were more aware of the influence of the environment on their children and had a more trusting relationship with them. They also found that those who were not very well informed about child rearing beforehand, improved most after the course, which was taken to indicate that the course was valuable to parents with a lower socio-economic background

Schultz, C. L., Nystul, M. S., & Law, H. G. (1980). Attitudinal outcomes of theoretical models of parent group education. *Journal of Individual Psychology*, 36, 1, 16-28.

Positive attitudinal changes in parents after PET were shown by Schultz and Nystul (1980).

Schultz, C. L., & Nystul, M. S. (1980). Mother-child interaction behavior as an outcome of theoretical models of parent group education. *Journal of Individual Psychology*, 36, 1, 3-15.

Positive behavioural changes to match the attitudinal change after PET was shown by Schultz and Nystul (1980).

Schultz, C. L. (1981). The family and Parent Effectiveness Training. *Australian Journal of Sex, Marriage and Family*, 3, 2, 135-142.

Schultz (1981) showed that PET had positive effects on specific family members, including mothers, fathers and children. Fathers were likely to become less authoritarian, mothers more positive about child-rearing, and children increased their positive relationships with both parents.

Schultz, C. L., & Khan, J. A. (1982). Mother-child interaction behaviour and Parent Effectiveness Training. *Australian Journal of Sex, Marriage and Family*, 3, 3, 133-138.

Positive behavioural changes to match the attitudinal change after PET were shown by Schultz and Kahn (1982) who reported that mothers demonstrated improved microskills with their young children in short-term interactions. These included appreciative comments, touching, managing disagreement and seeking the child's opinion.

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Schultz, C. L. (1985). Parent group education: A review of comparative studies. *Australian Journal of Sex, Marriage and Family*, 6, 1, 5-13.

Pointing out methodological problems in some of the PET research to date, and citing the extreme difficulty of mounting impeccable research in the area of parent education, Schultz proposed a "continuum of fallibility" along which researchers must strive to improve. She pointed out that progress is dependent on the establishment of a firm empirical foundation.

Wood, C. D., & Davidson, J. A. (1987). PET: an outcome study. *Australian Journal of Sex, Marriage and Family*, 8, 131-141.

Nine parents taking an eight-week course in Parent Effectiveness Training (PET) gained new cognitive skills (compared to a 10-parent control group) in active listening, confrontation and conflict resolution, and these skills were maintained sixteen weeks later. Assessment with a specially constructed Parent-Child Response Sheet tested parents' ability to decide which skill was required, and then spontaneously to formulate an appropriate response found large changes in parents' cognitions about situations related to the basic skills of active listening, confrontation and conflict resolution. Considerable improvement was reported by parents in the PET group on specific goals identified at the commencement of the course.

Wood, C.D., & Davidson, J.A. (1993). Conflict resolution in the family: A PET evaluation study. *Australian Psychologist*, 28, 100-104.

Thirteen parent-adolescent pairs who completed the appropriate Effectiveness Training program (PET or YET) achieved significantly greater improvement in conflict resolution skills from pretraining to posttraining compared to the matched control group, including both parents and adolescents. Compared with the control group, the PET parents improved significantly in Assertiveness and Conflict Resolution, with a trend for improvement in Active Listening. The YET teenagers showed a highly significant improvement in Conflict Resolution, although gains on the separate skills of Assertiveness and Active Listening did not reach significance. Nevertheless the study showed that habitual patterns of communication can successfully be changed in a family situation.

Wood, C.D., & Davidson, J.A. (1994/1995). Parenting for peace seven years on. London: *Peace Psychology Review*, 1, 2, 123-129.

In this study all available parents from the 1987 investigation (8 parents and nine controls) were again assessed in a seven-year follow-up. The gains achieved by the PET group in comparison to the control group remained statistically significant for all three scales. Broadly speaking they had fallen to about half the maximum gains at posttest. These findings are encouraging in that they demonstrate long-term gains from a single course, with direct value for parenting, and indirectly for the diffusion of peace-related skills in the wider community.

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Wood, C. D., & Davidson, J.A. (2000). The way we talk to our children: PET Australian style [Abstract]. *Australian Journal of Psychology*, 52 (Suppl.), 122.

A simplified Australian workbook for Parent Effectiveness Training (PET) came into use in 1998. It was hoped that the change would both facilitate the teaching of family communication skills and extend their application. The effectiveness of the new workbook was evaluated through 25 PET courses run by 12 qualified instructors in 6 states of Australia. Two hundred and thirty-two parents (81 standard workbook, 70 Australian version and 81 controls) completed pre and post-tests on the Parent-Child Response Sheet (PCRS, Wood, 1996), which measures acquisition of listening and confrontive skills, and the resolution of conflict. All PCRS responses were typed, completely randomised and scored blind by two trained independent raters. Both PET groups showed significant improvement compared to the control group on all measures. The improvement was significantly greater for those using the Australian version compared to the standard PET for the skills of listening and confrontation, but not for conflict resolution.

Wood, C. D., & Davidson, J.A. (2001). Less stress and more success: PET for Australian parents [Abstract]. *Australian Journal of Psychology*, 53 (Suppl.), 182.

From 1998 the standard American workbook for Parent Effectiveness Training (PET) was largely replaced by a simplified Australian workbook. Both included a section for objectives so parents can evaluate their subsequent progress and achievement. One hundred and fifty-one parents (70 US workbook, 81 Australian workbook) completed this section at pre-test, and assigned a subjective units of distress (SUDS) score for the stress they felt about each identified issue. At the end of the course each was given a copy of the issues without the SUDS scores and asked to assess the current level of stress in the same way. Eighty-one controls identified the issues they felt were problems with their children (including SUDS scores) and as nearly as possible at the same interval as the course completed the same post-test. Both PET groups compared to the control group reported substantial and statistically significant reduction in stress, though no significant differences were found between courses using the different workbooks.

Wood, C. D., & Davidson, J.A. (2002a). Emotional skills and stress: Parents' stress reduction following PET training in empathic listening, non-antagonistic assertiveness and family conflict resolution [Abstract]. *Australian Journal of Psychology*, 54 (Suppl.), 64.

The PET workbook includes a section for objectives so that the parents can evaluate their subsequent progress and achievement. In this study 151 parents completed this section at pre-test and assigned a subjective unit of distress (SUDS) score for the stress they felt about each issue. At the end of the course each was given a copy of the issues without the SUDS score, and asked to assess the current level of stress in the same way. Eighty-one controls identified the issues they felt were problems with their children, including SUDS scores, and as nearly as possible at the same interval as the course completed the same post-test. The PET group compared to the control group reported a substantial and statistically significant reduction in stress. After 8 weeks'

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training PET parents reported 23.4 % of their goals achieved, 61.9 % partially achieved, 10.4% not achieved, and 4.3 % no longer relevant.

Wood, C. D. & Davidson, J.A. (2002b). Qualitative issues in parent-child relationships identified in Parent Effectiveness Training. In K.A. Moore (Ed.), *Proceedings of the 2nd Australasian Psychology of Relationships Conference: Relationships: At home and abroad* (pp. 36-48). Melbourne: Australian Psychological Society.

This investigation focused on parenting problems reported by 232 parents (151 PET and 81 controls) from 6 Australian States in relation to child behaviour and management. The parents reported a total of 1044 issues of concern, which were collapsed into 60 categories and further classified as primarily involving Child Management, Relationship or Parent Self-Management issues. The paper examines the cognitive changes and altered styles of expression demonstrated in the pre-post responses of the PET parents to a set of hypothetical parenting situations. The responses illustrate a shift (not seen in the control parents) from the more usually accepted stance of parent as unilateral decision-maker to one encouraging emotional awareness and self-control, together with collaborative action based on the relationship.

Wood, C.D. (2003). How we talk to our children: An evaluation of Parent Effectiveness Training for emotional competence. University of Tasmania: Unpublished doctoral thesis.

Converging studies in empathic listening (Ickes, 1997), emotional intelligence (Bar-On 2000, 2001) and conflict resolution (Sanson & Bretherton, 2001; Alvy, 1994) point to the importance of parent training for bringing up socially competent children in a world so changed in western countries that traditional parenting practices are less than effective. Both behaviour and the ability to manage emotion can be affected by interactions with the parent in infancy (Fischer & Rose, 1994) childhood and adolescence (Gottman, 1997). Appropriate assertiveness is an important component of communication skill (Wilson & Gallois, 1993). Conflict resolution skills require a combination of empathic listening, assertiveness and creative problem solving (Littlefield, Love, Peck & Wertheim, 1993).

Parent Effectiveness Training (PET, Gordon, 1976) focuses attention on the development of empathic family relationships leading to autonomy and self-responsibility in children through parent training in empathic listening, appropriate assertiveness and conflict resolution. PET reaches over 900 parents annually around Australia, using a newly developed workbook (Wood, 1997) simplified without loss of content as part of this study. The present investigation provides an extensive study of PET in Australia using a three-group comparison (70 standard US workbook, 81 Australian workbook and 81 controls with no PET) comparing parents' pretest and posttest results with outcome measures following a PET program. Verbal and cognitive skills acquisition was measured using the Parent-Child Response Sheet (PCRS, Wood & Davidson, 1987, 1994/95). Parents' family management concerns were collected through the parent-listed objectives for training and the Issues of Parental Concern (IPC, Gordon, 1976; Wood, 1996)

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including ratings of the stress they felt about each issue on the SUDS scale (Wolpe, 1990) before and after PET.

Both PET groups achieved substantially and significantly higher scores than controls on empathic listening, appropriate assertiveness and conflict resolution as measured by the PCRS. Compared with controls the PET parents showed a significantly greater reduction in levels of parental stress about their family concerns. Males scored significantly higher in listening skills using the vernacular version, although there were no statistically significant differences between the workbooks. Extensive qualitative reports indicated that parents had made satisfactory changes in family management procedures, improved relationships with children and increased levels of family harmony. These findings confirm the conclusions of earlier research, including the meta-analysis of PET studies (Cedar & Levant, 1990), and provide the first extensive evaluation of PET implemented at a community level in the light of emerging awareness of emotional intelligence and the need for family development of interpersonal communication skills.

Note. Abstracts dating from the year 2000 relate to research from this extensive study, including poster presentations, designated [Abstract], at Annual Conferences of the Australian Psychological Society.

Wood, C.D. & Davidson, J.A. (2003a). Helping families cope: A fresh look at Parent Effectiveness Training. Family Matters, 65, pp.28-33.

This article documented the parenting problems cited by Australian parents involved in an extensive Australian study (see above) and detailed some of the changes in communication, attitudes and behavioural responses made by those who had taken PET. They concluded that the cognitive and structural change in the verbal expression of emotion-related socialisation practices shown by these parents points to the contemporary relevance of PET.

Wood, C.D. & Davidson, J.A. (2003b). Managing family conflict. [Abstract]. Australian Journal of Psychology, 55 (Suppl), This presentation reported preliminary results of an investigation into the effects of workbook, gender and education showing parents' improved acquisition of skills and greater stress reduction about parenting issues compared with controls following the PET course.

Wood, C.D. & Davidson, J.A. (2003c). A paper and pencil test for the assessment of PET communication skills. In K.A. Moore (Ed.), Proceedings of the 3rd Australasian Psychology of Relationships Conference: Relationships: Family, work and community (pp.125-130).. Melbourne: Australian Psychological Society.
This study presented experimental evidence to support the use of the Parent-Child Response Sheet as a sensitive and valid measure for the assessment of the PET communication skills of Active Listening, appropriate Assertiveness and Conflict Resolution.



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Davidson and Wood (2004) in an experimental investigation of the Conflict Resolution Model of Littlefield, Love, Peck and Wertheim (1993) included results from collaborative research into the model and into PET conflict resolution, which utilises both listening and assertive skills as part of creative problem solving.

(*Theory into Practice* is a scholarly journal published quarterly by the Ohio State University College of Education. Guest edited by David W Johnson and Roger T. Johnson, the articles place the research on national and international conflict resolution and peer mediation in the context of other factors that influence the program's success. Conflict resolution and peer mediation is the theme of the winter issue).

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