

# Child Discipline

Ontario Parents' Knowledge,  
Beliefs and Behaviours

*best start  
meilleur départ*

by/par health **nexus** santé



## Acknowledgements

The Best Start Resource Centre would like to thank Leger for completing this Ontario parent survey about child discipline, providing the data analysis and identifying preliminary trends. We would also like to thank Chelsea Kirkby for her work in summarizing the results implications in this report. Louise Choquette was the project lead from the Best Start Resource Centre.

The Best Start Resource Centre supports service providers across Ontario through consultation, training and resources, in the areas of preconception, prenatal and child health. Best Start Resource Centre is a key program of Health Nexus.



For more information about the Best Start Resource Centre, contact:



by/par health **nexus** santé

**Best Start Resource Centre**  
**Health Nexus**  
 180 Dundas Street West, Suite 301  
 Toronto, ON M5G 1Z8  
 Phone: 1-800-397-9567  
 Email: [beststart@healthnexus.ca](mailto:beststart@healthnexus.ca)  
 Websites: [www.beststart.org](http://www.beststart.org) and [www.healthnexus.ca](http://www.healthnexus.ca)

### *Use of this resource*

The Best Start Resource Centre thanks you for your interest in, and support of, our work. Best Start permits others to copy, distribute or reference the work for non-commercial purposes on condition that full credit is given. Because our resources are designed to support local health promotion initiatives, we would appreciate knowing how this resource has supported, or been integrated into, your work ([beststart@healthnexus.ca](mailto:beststart@healthnexus.ca)).

### *Citation*

Best Start Resource Centre. (2014). *Child Discipline: Ontario Parents' Knowledge, Beliefs and Behaviours*, 2014. Toronto, Ontario, Canada: author.

# Table of Contents

<b>Summary</b> .....	<b>3</b>
<b>Résumé (in French)</b> .....	<b>5</b>
<b>Introduction</b> .....	<b>6</b>
1.1 Purpose .....	6
1.2 Child Discipline .....	6
1.3 Methodology .....	8
1.4 Limitations .....	10
<b>Survey Results</b> .....	<b>11</b>
2.1 Parents' Knowledge and Beliefs towards Child Discipline .....	11
2.2 Child Discipline and Parenting Behaviour .....	14
2.3 Source of Child-Discipline Information .....	18
<b>Recommendations for Ontario Initiatives</b> .....	<b>23</b>
3.1 Populations of Interest .....	23
3.2 Key Messages .....	25
3.3 Strategies .....	25
<b>References</b> .....	<b>26</b>
<b>Appendix 1 – Questionnaire for Parents – Child Discipline</b> .....	<b>27</b>



## Summary

A survey was done in 2013 by the Best Start Resource Centre to determine parents' knowledge, beliefs and behaviours towards child discipline. A total of 500 parents, or main caregivers of children zero to six years old living in Ontario filled out the survey.\* Here are the main findings:

- Overall, parents with a child aged 6 years or younger were not very knowledgeable about Canada's laws regarding physical punishment for children. Parents' perception of Canadian laws was more in line with the *Convention on the Rights of the Child*, which prohibits the use of violence on children.
- The majority of parents reported that, at least occasionally, they got annoyed with their child for doing something he or she was not supposed to and lost their temper.
- Although one quarter of parents thought that slapping or spanking a child was an effective method to discipline a child, and used that approach, more than half the parents believed this method taught children that it is acceptable to hit others.
- A large majority of parents believed that putting a child in time-out was an effective discipline method and used that technique.

\* For convenience, the terms *parents*, *mothers* and *fathers* are inclusive of all primary caregivers.

- Parents who used corporal punishments belonged to all socio-economic groups. The use of corporal punishment was greater with parents 35 to 44 years old when compared to younger parents. The use was lower by parents with a high school diploma or less education, than by parents with college, trade or technical training.
- When we asked parents what type of information they were looking for regarding child discipline, a majority of parents did not know what they were looking for. This was more prevalent for fathers.
- Parents were influenced in their parenting by family, friends and colleagues. Their main information sources in this area were also Internet and social media, as well as their child's teacher or educator and their health care provider. Internet was particularly influential for parents aged less than 35 years old.

The main recommendations of this report are the following:

- Parents need practical suggestions to help them manage their reactions to their child's behaviour in a positive way, without using punishment.
- The strategies offered should be attractive to fathers, who are more likely to erroneously believe that strict discipline and punitive techniques are effective. Mothers and the general public would also benefit from such strategies.
- Social media and Internet are good ways to reach parents of young children.
- Childcare providers and teachers, as well as health care providers, are key service providers who can help disseminate information to parents on effective discipline methods.



## Résumé

Un sondage a été effectué en 2013 par le Centre de ressources Meilleur départ afin de déterminer les connaissances, croyances et comportements des parents en ce qui a trait à la discipline des enfants. Un total de 500 parents, ou personnes principalement responsables d'enfants de zéro à six ans, vivant en Ontario ont répondu au questionnaire.\* Voici les principales constatations :

- Les parents connaissaient peu les lois canadiennes ayant trait au châtime corporel mais leurs croyances allaient dans le même sens que la *Convention relative aux droits de l'enfant des Nations Unies* qui ne permet aucun châtime corporel.
- La plupart des parents ont indiqué qu'au moins occasionnellement, ils étaient agacés par leur enfant parce que celui-ci avait fait quelque chose inapproprié et avaient perdu leur sang-froid.
- Bien qu'environ le quart des parents pensaient que de taper ou donner une fessée soient des méthodes efficaces pour éduquer un enfant, et utilisaient cette approche, plus de la moitié des parents pensaient que ces méthodes enseignaient aux enfants que c'est correct de frapper les autres.
- Une grande majorité de parents croyaient que mettre un enfant en pénitence était une méthode efficace pour discipliner un enfant et utilisaient cette technique.
- Les parents qui utilisaient les châtime corporels provenaient de tous les groupes socio-économiques. L'utilisation était plus grande chez les parents de 35 à 44 ans en comparaison aux parents plus jeunes. L'utilisation de châtime corporels était moins élevée parmi les parents ayant une éducation secondaire ou inférieure, que parmi les parents ayant un niveau d'éducation collégial, un métier ou une formation technique.
- Lorsqu'on a demandé aux parents quel type d'information ils recherchaient sur le sujet de la discipline des enfants, une majorité de parents ne savaient pas ce qu'ils recherchaient. Ceci était plus marqué chez les pères.
- Les parents étaient influencés dans leur parentage par la famille, les amis et les collègues. Leurs sources d'informations principales dans ce domaine incluaient aussi Internet et les médias sociaux ainsi que l'éducatrice ou l'enseignante de leur enfant et leur fournisseur de soins de santé. Internet était particulièrement influent chez les parents de moins de 35 ans.

Les recommandations principales de ce rapport sont les suivantes :

- Les parents ont besoin de suggestions pratiques pour les aider à gérer de façon positive leurs réactions aux comportements de leurs enfants, sans avoir recours à des punitions.
- Les stratégies utilisées devraient être conçues pour intéresser les pères, qui croient à tort que la discipline stricte et les punitions sont efficaces. Les mères et le public en général bénéficieraient aussi de telles stratégies.
- Les médias sociaux et Internet sont de bons moyens pour rejoindre les parents de jeunes enfants.
- Les éducatrices et enseignantes à la petite enfance, ainsi que les fournisseurs de soins de santé, sont des personnes clés qui peuvent aider à disséminer de l'information aux parents sur les méthodes efficaces de discipline.

\* Les termes *parents*, *mères* et *pères* sont inclusifs de toutes les personnes principalement responsables d'enfants.



## Introduction

### 1.1 Purpose

This report presents data from the Best Start Resource Centre's 2013 survey on child discipline. The survey was directed to parents or main caregivers of children aged 6 years or younger living in Ontario, examining their knowledge, beliefs and behaviours regarding child discipline. Parents' sources of information on child-discipline topics and the types of resources they were seeking were also explored.

The results described in this report can be used to guide future strategies to support parents in developing healthy, safe and effective child-discipline practices.

Please note that the words *parent*, *father* and *mother* are used throughout this report for continuity; however, they are inclusive of all primary caregivers who responded to the survey, such as a grandparent or foster parent who has a primary responsibility for a child. The term *father* represents any primary male caregiver and the term *mother* represents any primary female caregiver.

### 1.2 Child Discipline

The meaning of child discipline and the acceptance of appropriate practices have evolved over time and are deeply influenced by personal, religious, cultural and societal values. Whereas historically, the use of corporal punishment on children was almost universally accepted, there has been a major shift in the past 30 years to move away from physical, verbal and emotional punishment (Durrant & Smith, 2011). This shift has been primarily influenced by the United Nations *Convention on the Rights of the Child*, which has led to a number of countries prohibiting the use of physical punishment on children.



## Convention on the Rights of the Child - United Nations

### Article 19 – Protection from all forms of violence

*Children have the right to be protected from being hurt and mistreated, physically or mentally. Governments should ensure that children are properly cared for and protect them from violence, abuse and neglect by their parents, or anyone else who looks after them. Any form of discipline involving violence is unacceptable. There are ways to discipline children that are effective in helping children learn about family and social expectations for their behaviour – ones that are non-violent, are appropriate to the child's level of development and take the best interests of the child into consideration.*

*From Unicef Fact Sheet*



*The interpretation of Section 43 of the Criminal Code of Canada allows parents to use physical force against their child if all the following conditions are met:*

- *Their child is between the ages of 2 and 12.*
- *Their child is capable of learning from the punishment.*
- *The punishment does not involve the use of an object or blows to the head.*
- *Only minor corrective force is used.*
- *The punishment is not degrading, inhuman or harmful.*

*Adapted from the Joint Statement on Physical Punishment of Children and Youth*

Canadian laws, however, still allow a degree of physical punishment of children in the home setting. A number of Canadian organizations have been working at changing this with the support of *the Joint Statement on Physical Punishment on Children and Youth* (Durrant, Ensom, & Coalition of Physical Punishment of Children and Youth, 2004). Although the prevalence of corporal punishment in Canada has not been fully agreed upon due to varying research methods and definitions of corporal punishment, it has been estimated at between 20% and 50% in Canada (Durrant, 2006). In this survey conducted by Leger (a research and strategic marketing firm), around a quarter of parents indicated that they had spanked or slapped their child in the past week.

A growing body of research is now showing that the use of corporal punishment is linked to a range of negative impacts on children, including increased mental-health problems, damage to the parent-child relationship and/or increased aggression in children (Durrant & Ensom, 2012; Ferguson, 2013; Gershoff, 2010; Gershoff, 2013). A review of the literature has also shown that spanking is ineffective and is becoming more and more discouraged by professional organizations (Gershoff, 2013).

Another discipline method often used by parents is time-outs. Research has shown negative effects as a result of time-outs, such as being distressing for a child, using shame and blame to modify behaviour, and a child not understanding the link between their behaviour and a time-out (Gartrell, 2001; Prochner & Hwang 2008; Schreiber, 1999). Experts warn that time-outs should be used appropriately and be brief, supervised and developmentally appropriate (Morawska & Sanders, 2011; Prochner & Hwang, 2008).



Research demonstrates the negative impacts of corporal and emotional punishment. Professional bodies and community organizations recommend that parents not use physical, verbal or emotional punishment when disciplining their child. Currently, many parenting programs and health and social service professionals encourage parents to:

- Build a strong attachment with their child.
- Foster a positive parent-child relationship through love, nurturing and respect.
- Have realistic expectations, an understanding of their child's developmental stage and capabilities, and respond to challenges in a manner that suits their child.
- Model a desired behaviour and encourage/praise their child when they are behaving well.
- Be consistent with the chosen approach to discipline.
- Set reasonable limits.
- Create a safe environment for their child.
- Take care of themselves (e.g., manage stress) so that they are able to respond to challenging behaviour in a calm and effective manner.

In everyday life, parents need to react in a positive manner to challenging behaviour of their child. Examples of this may include:

- Taking a moment to analyse the situation and the reasons for the child's behaviour before reacting to the behaviour.
- Looking at the situation from the child's point of view and acknowledging the needs of the child.
- Helping the child understand why the behaviour is not acceptable (for example, due to danger or in respect for others).
- Helping the child problem-solve.
- Providing choices that are acceptable.
- Helping the child fix past errors (for example, cleaning a mess).
- Providing the child the assurance that they are loved unconditionally.



### 1.3 Methodology

In October 2013, the Best Start Resource Centre implemented an online survey across Ontario to determine parental knowledge and beliefs, parent information sources and desired resources related to the topic of child discipline.

Leger was contracted to run the survey, provide data analysis and identify findings of significance. The survey included 500 adults living in Ontario who, at the time of the survey, were parents or main caregivers of a child aged 6 years or younger. A probability sample of the same size would yield a margin of error of  $\pm 4.4\%$ , 19 times out of 20.

The survey was completed using Leger's online panel Legerweb, which has approximately 460,000 members nationally. Panel members are randomly selected to receive email invitations to individual surveys. Stringent strategies are in place to ensure high data-quality standards and privacy protection for respondents.

The following table is a summary of demographics of the respondents of this survey.

Parents or main caregivers of a child aged 6 years or younger (n=500)	Number of Respondents	Proportion of Respondents
<b>GENDER</b>		
Male	199	40%
Female	301	60%
<b>PLACE OF BIRTH</b>		
Born in Canada	379	76%
Born outside of Canada	121	24%
<b>AGE</b>		
Less than 25 years	31	6%
25-34 years	203	41%
35-44 years	202	40%
45-54 years	60	12%
55 and over	4	1%
<b>EDUCATION</b>		
High School or less	136	27%
Community College, Trade or Technical Training	161	32%
University	203	41%
<b>FAMILY SITUATION</b>		
Live with child(ren) full time	471	94%
Live with child(ren) more than half the time (unequally shared custody)	8	2%
Live with child(ren) half the time (equally shared custody)	14	3%
Live with child(ren) less than half the time (unequally shared custody)	4	1%
<b>LIVING SITUATION</b>		
With partner (married or not)	445	89%
Not with partner	52	10%
With other adults who are not a partner (e.g., grandparents, friends)	82	16%
<b>PERCENTAGE OF FAMILY INCOME SPENT ON FOOD, SHELTER AND CLOTHING</b>		
64% or more	167	34%
23%-63%	153	30%
Less than 23%	19	4%

Table 1.3: Summary of Demographics of Ontario 2013 Respondents

## 1.4 Limitations

Limitations of this report include:

- Given the survey size, it is not possible to identify statistically valid findings for certain smaller subsets of respondents.
- The survey was conducted online, which may have resulted in an under-representation of respondents with lower income, educational achievements and computer skills.
- Respondents were given the opportunity to complete the survey in English or French, which may have resulted in an under-representation of respondents who do not communicate in English or French.
- Leger has found that online surveys show similar results to telephone surveys. However, as telephone surveys only include land lines, and not mobile phone numbers, there is also a socio-economic bias in phone surveys.

Please note:

- Data categories in this report may add up to slightly more or less than 100% as a result of rounding, and/or because response categories for “don’t know” or “prefer not to answer” may not be included in the data table.
- Table and chart titles indicate the population(s) represented in the data. The discussion below each table provides relevant information about sub-populations in the survey data.
- In this report, the term “significant” refers to findings of statistical significance with a minimum confidence interval of 95%.
- Economic status was determined by the percentage of household after-tax income spent on food, shelter and clothing. This includes all essential expenditures except telephone, Internet, transportation and entertainment. This corresponds to the low-income cut-offs (LICOs) from Statistics Canada (2009). The following categories were used:
  - High economic status: less than 23% of income spent on essentials.
  - Medium economic status: 23% to 62% of income spent on essentials.
  - Low economic status: 63% or more of income spent on essentials.



## Survey Results

### 2.1 Parents' Knowledge and Beliefs towards Child Discipline

Overall, parents with a child aged 6 years or younger were not particularly knowledgeable about Canada's law regarding physical punishment for children (see table 2.1a). Most parents believed that Canada has stricter laws regarding physical punishment than are currently in place.

Statement	True	False	Unsure	Correct Answer
Canada's law prohibits parents from physically punishing children of any age.	61%	24%	15%	False
Canada's law allows parents to physically punish children of any age.	11%	74%	15%	False
Canada's law allows parents to use physical punishment if the child is capable of learning from it.	11%	70%	19%	True
Canada's law allows parents to use physical punishment as long as they do not use objects or strike the child's head.	19%	62%	19%	True
Canada's law allows parents to physically punish children between the ages of 2 and 12.	15%	68%	17%	True

Table 2.1a: Parental knowledge of Canada's law on physical punishment, Ontario 2013

On average, parents with a child aged 6 years or younger only answered one out of five of the above questions correctly.

Most parents correctly indicated that the statement, "Canada's law allows parents to physically punish children of any age," is false. Mothers were more likely than fathers to answer this correctly by identifying the statement as false (78% versus 69%).

Fathers were significantly more likely than mothers to know that Canada's law allows the use of physical punishment if the child is capable of learning from it (19% versus 7%); allows the use of physical force as long as they do not use objects or strike the child's head (25% versus 15%); and allows parents to physically punish their child who is between the ages of 2 and 12 (23% versus 10%).

Parents who were born outside of Canada believed that Canadian laws had little tolerance for physical punishment towards children and prohibit parents from physically punishing children of any age. Twenty-six percent (26%) of parents born outside Canada thought that the laws prohibited parents from physically punishing children of any age, compared to 16% of Canadian-born parents.

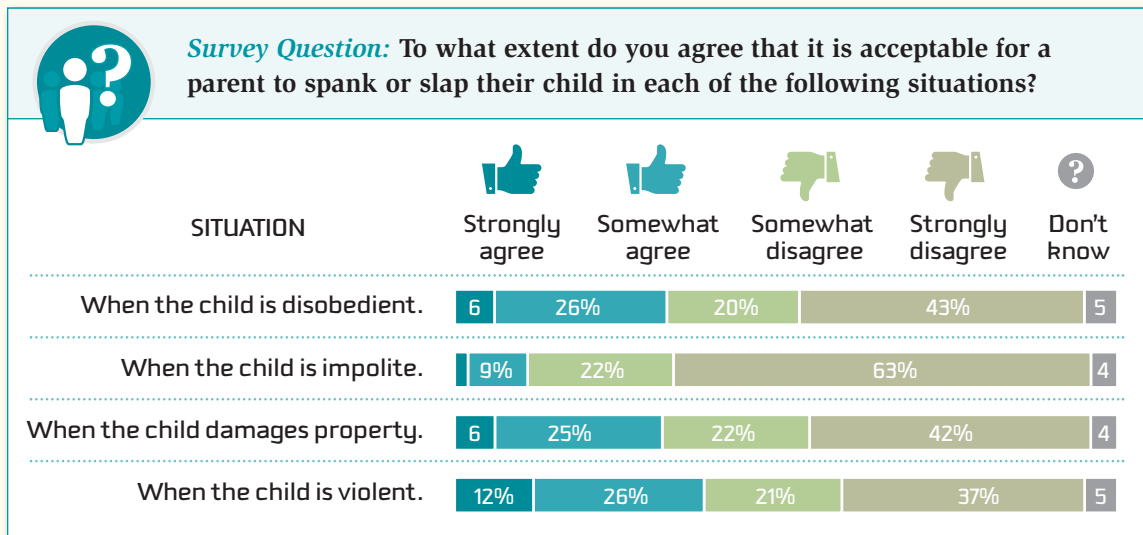


Table 2.1b: Responses to when it is acceptable for a parent to spank or slap their child, Ontario 2013

In general, most parents felt it was not acceptable for a parent to spank or slap their child in certain situations, such as when the child is disobedient, impolite, damages property or is violent. When participating parents did resort to spanking or slapping, the most accepted reason parents identified was if their child was violent.

Fathers supported the use of physical and verbal discipline more than mothers. Overall, fathers were more likely to agree that slapping or spanking is an effective way to educate children (34% versus 21% of mothers). Fathers found it more acceptable than mothers to spank or slap their child when he or she is disobedient (37% versus 28%), impolite (19% versus 6%) or damages property (38% versus 28%).

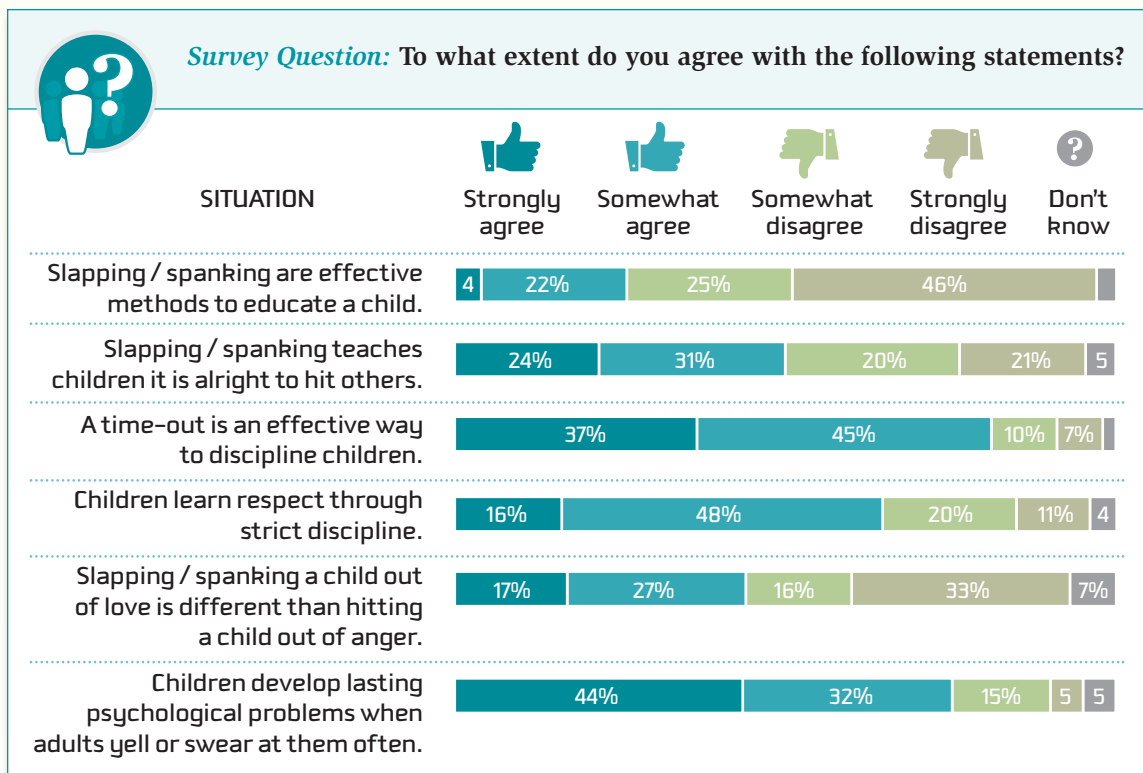


Table 2.1c: Measure of agreement to statements regarding child discipline, Ontario 2013

Most parents disagreed with the statement, *“Slapping/spanking is an effective method to educate a child,”* (72%) with more mothers than fathers disagreeing with this statement (76% versus 63%). Fathers were more likely than mothers to agree with the statement, *“Children learn respect through strict discipline,”* (72% versus 60%).

Parents with a household income of over \$100K were more likely to agree that slapping/spanking is an effective method to educate a child than parents with a household income of less than 40K (35% versus 22%).

Over half of parents agreed with the statement, *“Slapping/spanking teaches children it is acceptable to hit others,”* (55%). Fathers were significantly more likely than mothers to disagree with this statement (48% versus 36%). In addition, more parents born in Canada agreed with this statement than those not born in Canada (58% versus 44%). Parents with a lower economic status were significantly more likely to agree that slapping/spanking teaches children it is alright to hit others than those with a higher economic status (56% versus 31%).



Almost half of parents agreed with the statement, *“Slapping/spanking a child out of love is different than hitting a child out of anger,”* (44%). Those living in the north were significantly more likely to agree that there is a difference than those living in the Greater Toronto Area (GTA) (61% versus 42%). In addition, parents 35-39 years old were more likely to agree to the above statement than those less than 35 years old (50% versus 39%).

Most parents agreed with the statement, *“Children develop lasting psychological problems when adults yell or swear at them often,”* (76%) with significantly more mothers than fathers agreeing with this statement (79% versus 70%).

The majority of parents agreed with the statement, *“A time-out is an effective way to discipline children,”* (81%). Those with a low economic status were also more likely to see this as an effective way to discipline children compared to those with a high economic status (86% versus 63%).

The majority of parents agreed with the statement *“Children learn respect through strict discipline”* (65%) with more fathers than mothers believing this to be true (72% versus 60%). Parents reporting an income greater than \$100K were significantly more likely to agree that children learn respect through strict discipline than parents earning less than \$80K (77% versus an average of 60%).

## 2.2 Child Discipline and Parenting Behaviour

Parents' beliefs are reflected in the way they discipline their child. This survey suggests that parents find their child's behaviour can be challenging and use a variety of approaches to discipline them.

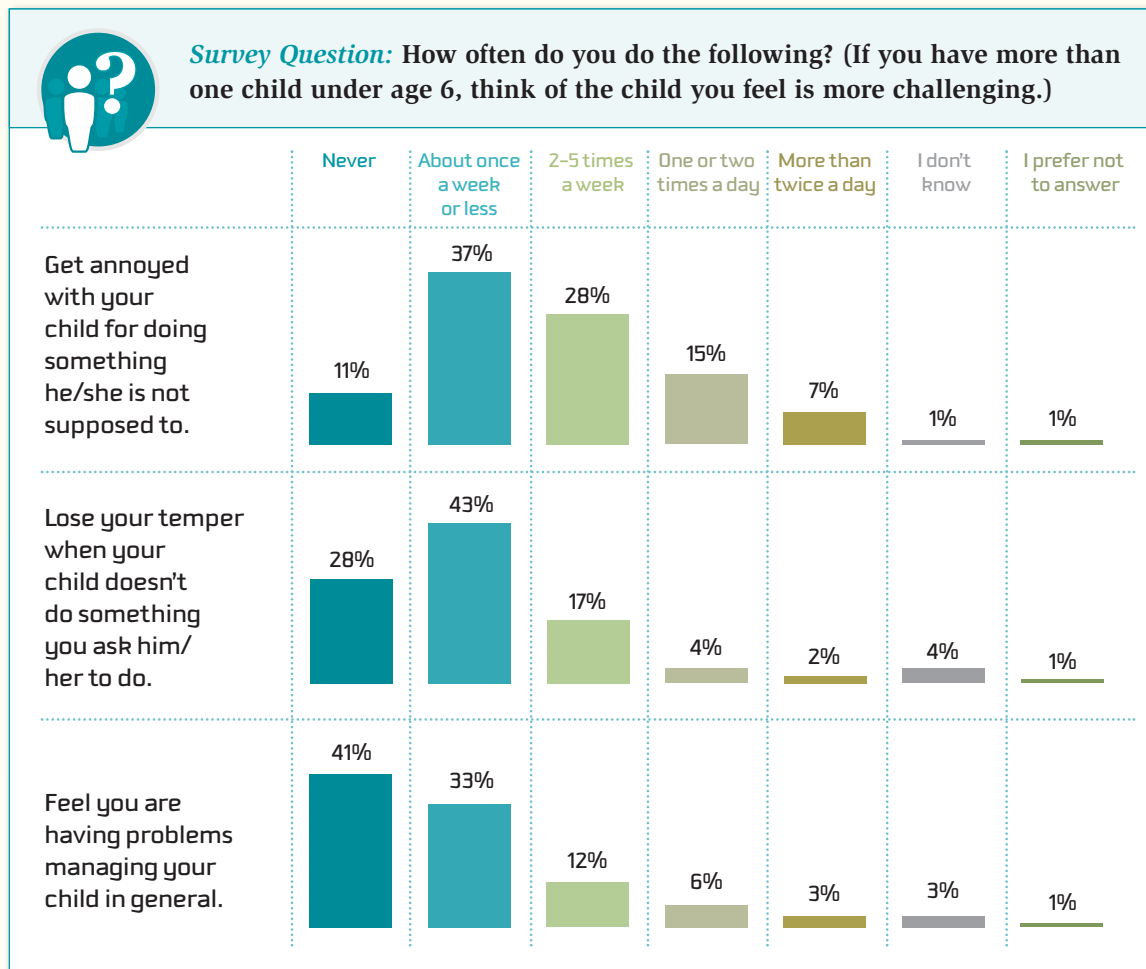


Table 2.2a: Frequency of parents' feelings or actions towards their child related to child discipline, Ontario 2013

The majority of parents reported that they get annoyed with their child for doing something he or she is not supposed to (87%). Mothers were significantly more likely than fathers to admit getting annoyed at least one or two times a day (19% versus 10%). In addition, parents born in Canada were more likely than parents born outside of Canada to say they get annoyed with their child one or two times a day (17% versus 10%).

The majority of parents also reported losing their temper occasionally when their child doesn't do something they ask. Parents born in Canada were significantly more likely to lose their temper than parents born outside of Canada (75% versus 59%).

Just over half of parents indicated that in general they were having problems managing their child (55%). Mothers were significantly more likely than fathers to feel this way (59% versus 48%).



**Survey Question:** How often have you done each of the following when your child breaks the rules or does something that he/she is not supposed to? (If you have more than one child under age 6, think of the child you feel is more challenging.)

	Never	About once a week or less	2-5 times a week	One or two times a day	More than twice a day	I don't know	I prefer not to answer
Tell the child to stop.	3%	13%	21%	28%	33%	1%	1%
Ignore it, do nothing.	51%	26%	10%	5%	3%	4%	1%
Raise your voice, scold or yell.	13%	36%	30%	13%	6%	2%	1%
Calmly discuss the problem with the child.	5%	23%	32%	22%	16%	1%	2%
Slap or spank the child.	68%	23%	2%	1%	1%	3%	2%
Distract the child.	19%	21%	22%	18%	15%	4%	1%
Threaten to spank (but not do it).	56%	25%	10%	4%	2%	2%	1%
Take away privileges or things.	13%	46%	27%	8%	4%	2%	1%
Put him/her in time-out in another room.	28%	42%	18%	7%	2%	3%	1%
Put him/her in time-out in the same room.	30%	37%	19%	7%	3%	3%	1%

Table 2.2b: Frequency of use of child-discipline methods, Ontario 2013



Parents were asked what they do when their child breaks the rules or does something that they are not supposed to do. Less than half of parents said that, at least occasionally they ignore the issue, or threaten to spank but do not do it (44%, 40% respectively).

The majority of parents reported that they raise their voice, scold or yell at least occasionally when their child breaks the rules or does something that they are not supposed to (84%). This was particularly true for parents over 45 years old compared to parents less than 35 years old (88% versus 80%). Fathers were more likely than mothers to say that they never raise their voice, scold or yell (16% versus 10%).

A smaller number of parents reported that they slap or spank their child at least occasionally (26%) with those 35-44 years old more likely to slap or spank than parents less than 35 years old (30% versus 23%). Parents with a college education are more likely to slap or spank their child at least occasionally than parents with a high school education or less (32% versus 20%).

Parents from the lower income bracket (less than \$40K) were less likely to slap or spank their child at least occasionally (20%) than those from a medium income bracket (average of 33% for \$40K to \$100K). Differences in slapping and spanking behaviour between Canadian-born parents and those born outside Canada were not statistically significant.



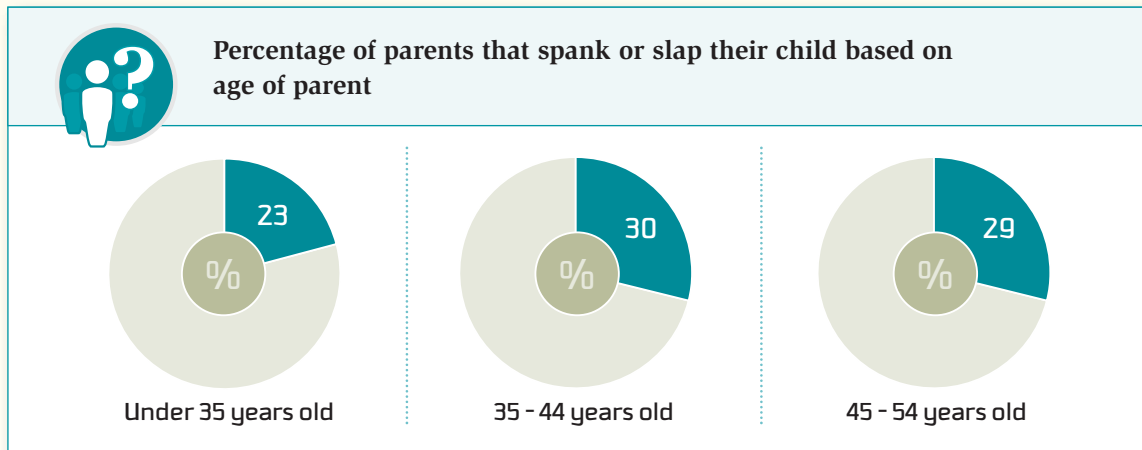


Chart 2.2c: Percentage of parents that spank or slap their child at least occasionally based on age of parent, Ontario 2013

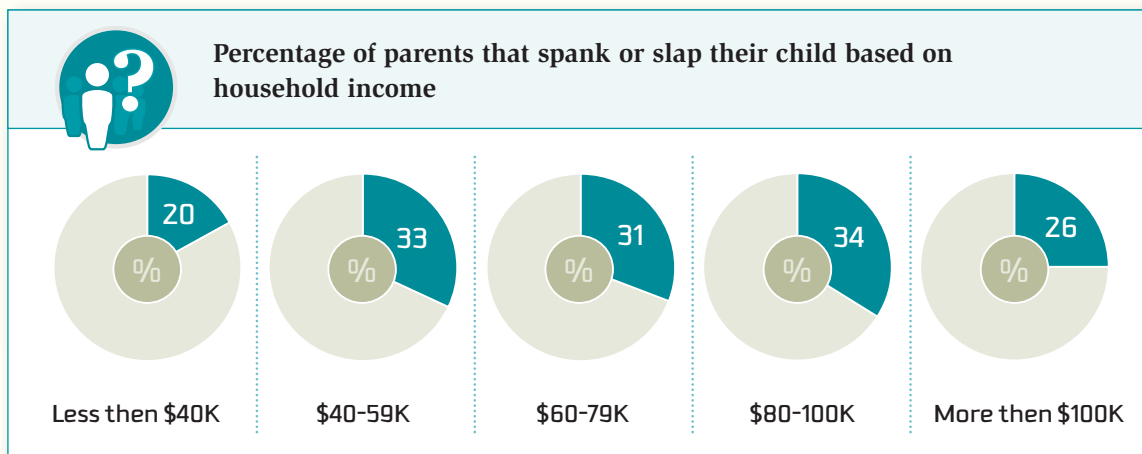


Chart 2.2d: Percentage of parents that spank or slap their child at least occasionally based on household income, Ontario 2013

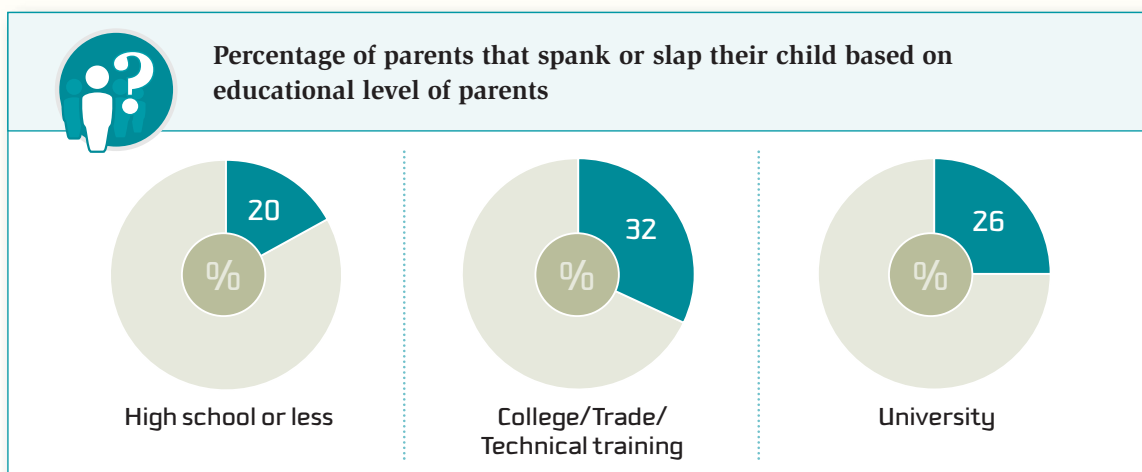


Chart 2.2e: Percentage of parents that spank or slap their child at least occasionally based on educational level of parents, Ontario 2013

Parents also reported other ways they respond when their child breaks the rules or does something they are not supposed to. The majority of parents said that they take away privileges or things at least occasionally (85%) with this being particularly true for parents 35-44 years old (89% versus 79% of parents less than 35 years old).

Most parents reported that they calmly discuss the problem with their child at least occasionally (92%), while slightly less indicated that they distract their child at least occasionally (76%).

Most parents reported that they have put their child in a time-out at least occasionally (69% said they have put their child in a time-out in a different room, 66% said they have put their child in a time-out in the same room). Parents born in Canada were more likely to put their child in a time-out in a different room than parents who were not born in Canada (72% versus 59%). Parents with a medium or high economic status were more likely to put their child in a time-out in the same room at least occasionally than those with a low economic status (74% of parents with a medium economic status and 81% of those with a high economic status versus 65% of parents with a low economic status).

### 2.3 Source of Child-Discipline Information

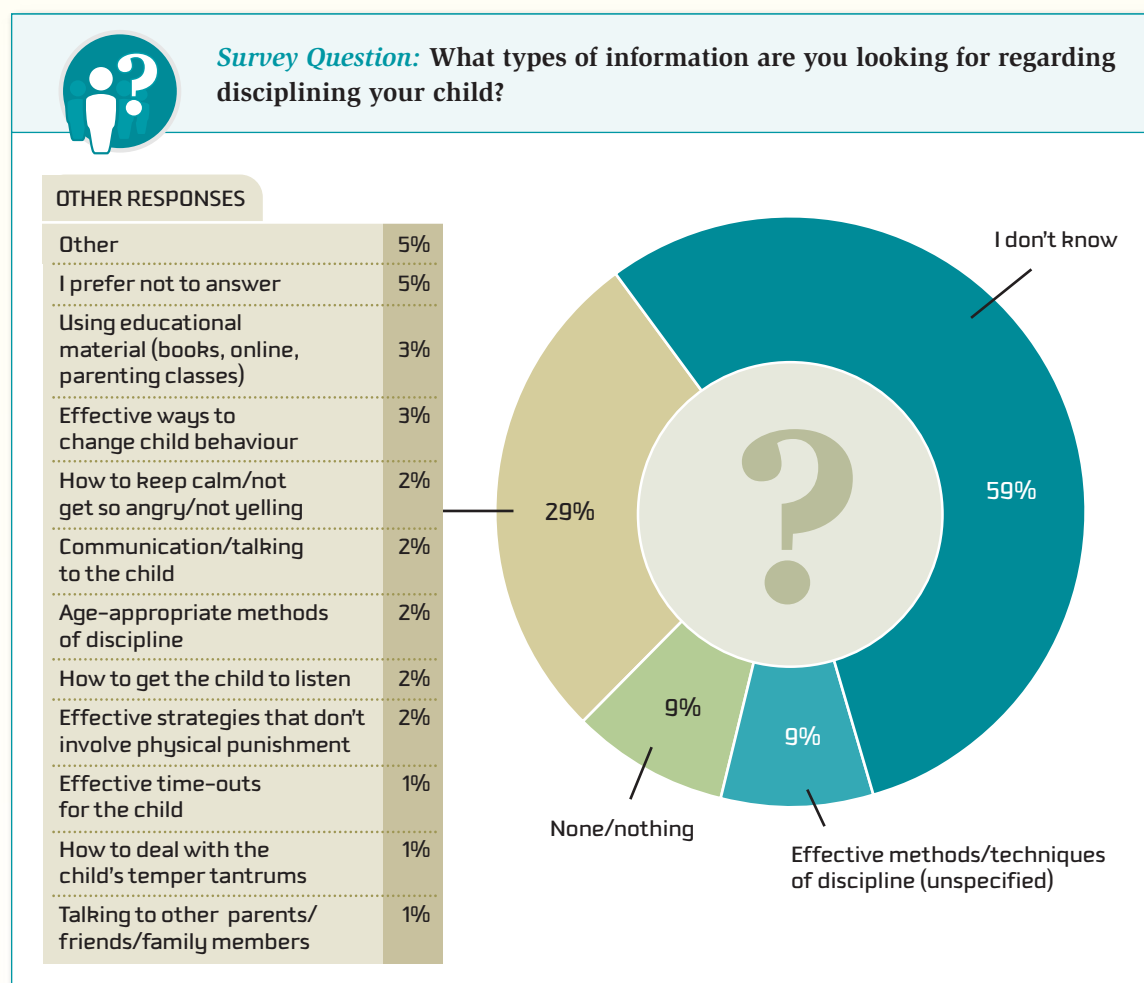



Table 2.3a: Types of information sought by parents related to child discipline, Ontario 2013

The majority of parents did not know what types of information they were looking for regarding disciplining their child (59%). Of parents who did not know, those living in the North were significantly more likely not to know than those living in the South, East and GTA (76% versus 56%, 58% and 58% respectively). Fathers were more likely to report that they didn't know what types of information they were seeking (68% versus 53% of mothers).

Of those parents who did know what they were looking for, 21% were seeking effective methods and techniques for disciplining their child. Fathers were more likely to report that they were looking for information about educational material such as books, online resources or parenting classes (15% versus 4% of mothers). Older parents were more likely than younger parents to be seeking information related to communicating/talking with the child (17% for 45 and older, 9% for 35-44 year olds, compared to 1% for younger than 35 years old).



**Survey Question:** In the past month, how often have you used the following sources for parenting information?

Source of Information	Daily	Weekly	Once /month	Never	I don't know
Internet (information website - parenting, news, health, etc.)	8%	24%	32%	33%	3%
Family, friends or colleagues	8%	31%	36%	23%	2%
TV	6%	6%	16%	69%	3%
Facebook	6%	7%	13%	71%	3%
Childcare provider or teacher	6%	10%	30%	50%	3%
Newspapers	3%	5%	14%	76%	2%
Radio	3%	4%	10%	80%	2%
YouTube	3%	4%	9%	82%	2%
Parent-child programs such as Ontario Early Years Centres	3%	7%	19%	67%	4%
Magazines	2%	9%	29%	57%	3%
Twitter	2%	3%	3%	90%	2%
Pamphlet	2%	4%	19%	71%	5%
Public library	2%	5%	17%	74%	3%
Health care provider (paediatrician, family doctor)	2%	3%	43%	48%	5%
Public health nurse	1%	3%	17%	76%	4%
Parenting classes/groups	1%	6%	11%	78%	4%
Public health unit	1%	3%	14%	79%	4%
Social worker	1%	2%	8%	86%	3%

Table 2.3b: Frequency of use of parenting information sources, Ontario 2013

When asked how often they have used a range of information sources, parents were most likely to report they used family, friends or colleagues (39%) or the Internet and/or social media (36%) as sources of parenting information daily or weekly in the past month. Parents less than 35 years old were significantly more likely to report that they used the Internet and/or social media as an information source daily or weekly than parents 35 years old and over (46% versus 28%).

Mothers were significantly more likely than fathers to report that they used family, friends or colleagues as a source of information daily or weekly (45% versus 30%). Parents were less likely to turn to traditional sources of media to get information about child discipline with less than a quarter saying they would use TV, radio or newspapers in the future (24%, 24% and 17% respectively). Magazines are still relatively popular with 41% of parents indicating they would use them as a source of child discipline information.

The survey results identified certain differences between parents born outside of Canada and those born in Canada regarding their sources of parenting information. (see Table 2.3c for details).

Source of Information	Born in Canada	Not Born in Canada
Childcare provider or teacher	14%	23%
Facebook	11%	20%
TV	10%	19%
YouTube	5%	14%
Public library	5%	13%

Table 2.3c: Daily or weekly use of parenting information sources, Ontario 2013

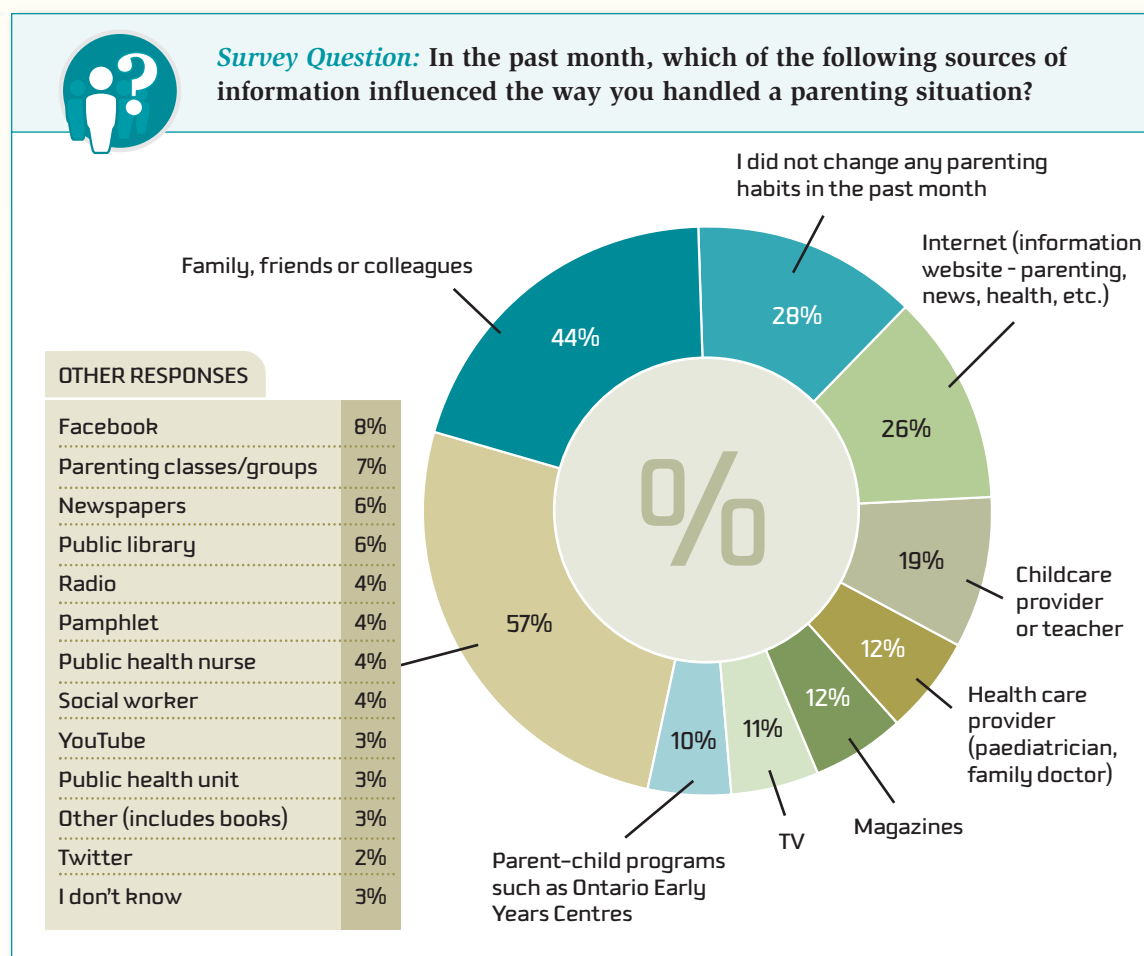


Table 2.3d: Sources of information that influenced how parents handled a parenting situation, Ontario 2013

When asked what sources of information influenced the way parents handled a parenting situation in the past month, they reported using the following sources of information: family, friends or colleagues (44%); information websites on the Internet (26%); childcare provider or teacher (19%); health care provider (12%); magazines (12%); TV (11%); and parent-child programs such as Ontario Early Years Centres (10%). Almost a third of parents indicated that they did not change any parenting habits in the past month (28%) with this being especially true for fathers (35% versus 24% compared to mothers).

Parents less than 35 years old were more influenced than those 35-44 years old by family, friends and colleagues (48% versus 37%). Younger parents were also more influenced by parenting classes (10% for 35 and younger and 5% for those 35-44).

Parents less than 35 years old were more likely to report that information found on the Internet influenced a parenting decision in the past month than those 35-44 years old (38% versus 21%). In addition, parents born outside of Canada were more likely to indicate that YouTube, Twitter, magazines and TV influenced a parenting decision in the past month than those born in Canada (see Table 2.3e for details).



Source of information	Born in Canada	Not Born in Canada
Magazines	10%	18%
TV	8%	18%
YouTube	2%	8%
Twitter	1%	5%

Table 2.3e: Sources of information that influenced how parents handled a parenting situation, Ontario 2013



**Survey Question:** How likely are you to use the following resources to get information about child discipline in the future?

RESOURCES	Very likely	Somewhat likely	Not very likely	Not at all likely	I don't know
Family, friends or colleagues	42%	34%	8%	12%	5
Internet (information website - parenting, news, health, etc.)	29%	36%	11%	19%	5
Health care provider (paediatrician, family doctor)	22%	34%	15%	24%	5
Childcare provider or teacher	21%	34%	15%	24%	6
Parent-child programs such as Ontario Early Years Centres	13%	23%	19%	39%	5
Magazines	11%	30%	14%	38%	7
Public library	9%	21%	18%	47%	6
Parenting classes/groups	8%	20%	22%	44%	6
Public health nurse	7%	21%	19%	46%	7
Public health unit	7%	20%	21%	47%	6
TV	6	18%	21%	48%	6
Facebook	6	13%	20%	56%	6
Pamphlet	6	25%	20%	42%	7
Newspapers	5	19%	17%	54%	6
Social worker	5	14%	19%	57%	6
YouTube	10%	17%	64%		5
Radio	14%	18%	58%		7
Twitter	6	14%	73%		6

Table 2.3f: Use of resources to get information about child discipline in the future, Ontario 2013

More than half of parents reported they were likely to use the following resources to get information about child discipline in the future: family, friends or colleagues (76%); the Internet and social media (67%); health care provider (56%); and childcare provider or teacher (55%). Mothers were significantly more likely than fathers to report that they would use the following resources: a health care provider (61% versus 47%); parent-child programs such as Ontario Early Years Centres (41% versus 30%); the Internet and social media (74% versus 57%); and magazines (47% versus 33%).

## Recommendations for Ontario Initiatives

This section discusses the survey findings in terms of their implications for Ontario parents and recommends approaches to sharing child-discipline best practices and information. Local communities are encouraged to use the provincial findings presented in this report alongside information specific to their community.

### 3.1 Populations of Interest

#### *Parents of a child aged 6 years or younger*

This survey implies that around 26% of children are slapped or spanked occasionally – this means that in Ontario, over a quarter of a million children aged 6 years or younger may be subjected to punishments contravening the *Convention on the Rights of the Child*. In addition to being ineffective and damaging to learning and the parent-child relationship, physical punishment can result in injury to the child.

In addition to physical punishment, a large number of parents reported using negative education methods such as raising their voice, scolding and using time-outs when their child did something that he or she was not supposed to do. Considering that parents admit to frequently getting annoyed with their child or losing their tempers when their child behaves in an undesirable way, offering more practical tools to manage parents' reactions and children's behaviour in a positive and effective way, without the use of verbal, emotional or physical punishment, would be helpful.

#### *Fathers*

It is difficult to fully understand the different needs of fathers and mothers with regards to child discipline and the impact parental practices might be having on children without knowing key information such as how much time parents are spending with their child and who is taking on the lead role in selecting and implementing disciplinary methods. However, the survey findings indicate a need for fathers to have guidance in this area.

Fathers tended to find physical discipline (e.g., spanking or slapping) to be an effective way to educate their child and found it more acceptable in certain situations than mothers (e.g., when their child is disobedient, impolite, damages property). More fathers reported that children learn respect through strict discipline than mothers. It should be noted that not all fathers indicated that they used negative discipline techniques. For example, more fathers than mothers said that they never raise their voice, scold or yell.

Fathers were more likely than mothers to indicate they did not change any parenting behaviours in the past month. More fathers than mothers reported that they did not know what information they would seek about child discipline. These trends suggest that fathers may not be as exposed to as much information about discipline as mothers, or are not as aware of the range of resources available to them. Given this, it could be useful to support fathers with relevant child-discipline messaging targeted and tailored to them.





### *Mothers*

Although fathers may benefit from additional support in awareness and accessing information regarding child discipline, mothers may also gain from some specific guidance related to child-discipline practices. Although to a lesser extent than fathers, mothers did report using physical discipline techniques and punitive strategies regularly. According to a Statistics Canada report, in 2010, women spent more than twice as much time on unpaid childcare in the household as men (Statistics Canada, 2011). This greater amount of time spent with children may be the reason that almost half of mothers said that they were having trouble managing their child in general and tended to get frustrated with their children more frequently than men. Women reported that they were looking for more practical information regarding child discipline, such as age-appropriate methods for disciplining their child.

### *Other populations*

It is interesting to note that younger parents with less education tend to have more positive beliefs and behaviours towards child discipline than older and more educated parents. Parents who immigrated to Canada tend to have similar behaviours than parents born in Canada. In some instances, however, immigrant parents may have different beliefs, such as not realizing that slapping and spanking teaches children it is acceptable to hit others. Due to small sample sizes, it is not possible to extract statistically significant data for newcomers (i.e., those who immigrated to Canada more recently, as opposed to those who may have been here for a number of years) or parents whose first language is French.

Certain populations may not have had an opportunity to participate in this survey, thus limiting the identification of trends related to child-discipline knowledge and practices. Parents with lower computer literacy skills and those who may not communicate in English or French may be less represented in the results.



All populations would likely benefit from practical guidance around child discipline as the majority of parents have expressed a need in this area. The challenge is to better understand the needs of all groups and to make child-discipline information and support accessible to all.

### 3.2 Key Messages

As mentioned previously, a quarter of parents spank or slap their children weekly, while the remaining often feel frustrated and angry with their child's behaviour and tend to raise their voices, scold, yell and put their child in a time-out in response to undesirable behaviour. More than half of parents did not know what types of information they were looking for on this topic, which may suggest that they did not know what kind of information was available.

Of those that did know what types of information they were looking for, effective methods and techniques of discipline were the most desired. Other information that parents mentioned included:

- Using educational material.
- Effective ways to change child behaviour.
- How to keep calm, decrease anger, avoid yelling.
- Communication with the child.
- Age-appropriate methods of discipline.

In summary, parents would appreciate information about child behaviour, along with practical ways to discipline and manage a child's behaviour.



### 3.3 Strategies

Since trends in child-discipline practices have evolved over time, and many parents are now seeking information from family, friends or colleagues (whose opinions may vary and may not be evidence-based), it is important to share a consistent message that corresponds to current best practices. The focus should remain on practical techniques to manage a child's behaviour without the use of physical, emotional and verbal punishment. To effectively teach the desired behaviour, all main caregivers of a child should be encouraged to use a consistent approach.

While most parents sought information related to child discipline from their social circles, it is difficult to ensure consistency across these channels. Parents also reported that they would likely use the Internet and social media to look for this information along with health care providers, childcare providers and teachers. Using the web as a platform to offer child-discipline information will likely reach the most parents. It is important to ensure that information provided in this format is easy to access, easy to understand and can be applied in challenging situations. Strategies involving health care providers, childcare providers and teachers should also be considered. Providing consistent, concise information to these providers along with training for this group on this topic would be ideal. Providing access to informational resources with practical advice in professional settings (daycares, schools, medical offices, etc.) would also be helpful and a likely place for parents to access this information.

## References

- Durrant, J. (2006). *Researching the Prevalence of Corporal Punishment of Children: A Working Paper*. Department of Family Social Sciences, University of Manitoba. Retrieved from: [www.umanitoba.ca/faculties/human\\_ecology/media/Durrant\\_1.pdf](http://www.umanitoba.ca/faculties/human_ecology/media/Durrant_1.pdf).
- Durrant, J., & Ensom, R. (2012). Physical punishment of children: lessons from 20 years of research. *Canadian Medical Association Journal*. 184:1373-1376.
- Durrant, J., Ensom, R., & Coalition on Physical Punishment of Children and Youth. (2004). *Joint Statement on Physical Punishment of Children and Youth*. Ottawa: Coalition on Physical Punishment of Children and Youth. Retrieved from: [www.cpha.ca/uploads/progs/\\_safeschools/joint\\_statement\\_e.pdf](http://www.cpha.ca/uploads/progs/_safeschools/joint_statement_e.pdf).
- Durrant, J., & Smith, A. (Eds.) (2011). *Global pathways to abolishing physical punishment : realizing children's rights*. Taylor and Francis e-Library.
- Durrant, J., Trocmé, N., Fallon, B., Milne, C., Black, T., & Petrowski, N. (2009). *Physical punishment of children: Assessing the validity of the legal definition of "reasonable force."* CECW Information Sheet #71E. Toronto, ON: University of Toronto, Faculty of Social Work. Retrieved from: [www.cwrp.ca/sites/default/files/publications/en/PhysPun71E.pdf](http://www.cwrp.ca/sites/default/files/publications/en/PhysPun71E.pdf).
- Ferguson, C.J. (2013). Spanking, corporal punishment and negative long-term outcomes: A meta-analytic review of longitudinal studies. *Clinical Psychology Review*. 33 (1):196-208.
- Gartrell, D. (2001). Replacing time-out: Part one – Using guidance to build an encouraging classroom. *Young Children*. 56(6):8 – 16.
- Gershoff, E.T. (2013). Spanking and child development: We know enough now to stop hitting our children. *Child Development Perspectives*. 7 (3): 133-137.
- Gershoff, E.T. (2010). More harm than good: A summary of scientific research on the intended and unintended effects of corporal punishment on children. *Law and Contemporary Problems*. 73(2):31-56.
- Morawska, A. & Sanders, M. (2011). Parental use of time out revisited: A useful or harmful parenting strategy? *Journal of Child and Family Studies*. 20(1): 1-8. DOI 10.1007/s10826-010-9371-x.
- Prochner, L., & Hwang Y. (2008). 'Cry and you cry alone' timeout in early childhood settings. *Childhood*. 15(4): 517-534.
- Statistics Canada. (2009). Low income cut-offs. *Statistics Canada*. Retrieved from [www.statcan.gc.ca/pub/75f0002m/2009002/s2-eng.htm](http://www.statcan.gc.ca/pub/75f0002m/2009002/s2-eng.htm)
- Statistics Canada. (2011). Women in Canada: A gender-based statistical report – Families, living arrangements and unpaid Work. *Statistics Canada, Social and Aboriginal Statistics Division*. Retrieved from: [www.statcan.gc.ca/pub/89-503-x/2010001/article/11546-eng.pdf](http://www.statcan.gc.ca/pub/89-503-x/2010001/article/11546-eng.pdf)
- Schreiber, M. E. (1999). Time-outs for toddlers: Is our goal punishment or education? *Young Children*, 54(4), 22-25.
- Unicef. FACT SHEET: A summary of the rights under the Convention on the Rights of the Child. Retrieved from [www.unicef.org/crc/files/Rights\\_overview.pdf](http://www.unicef.org/crc/files/Rights_overview.pdf)

## APPENDIX 1

# Questionnaire for Parents - Child Discipline\*

### Demographics Questions

1. Are you the parent or primary caregiver of a child aged 6 years or younger? (A primary caregiver may be a grandparent or a foster parent who is the main person responsible for a child.)

Yes     No

*NOTE: The survey was terminated if the responded was not a parent or primary caregiver of a child 6 years or younger.*

2. Which situation best describes your family situation?

- I live with my child(ren) full time
- I live with my child(ren) more than half the time (unequally shared custody)
- I live with my child(ren) half the time (equally shared custody)
- I live with my child(ren) less than half the time (unequally shared custody)
- I prefer not to answer

3. Do you live with a partner (married or not)?

Yes     No     I prefer not to answer

4. Do you live with other adults who are not your partner, for example grandparents, friends?

Yes     No     I prefer not to answer

5. What is your sex?

Male     Female

6. How old are you?

- Less than 24 years     25-34 years     35-44 years
- 45-54 years     Over 55     I prefer not to answer

7. What is the highest level of education that you completed?

- Less than high school     High school
- Community college, trade, technical training     University – Bachelor
- University – Master or Doctorate     I don't know     I prefer not to answer

\* A French version of the questionnaire was also available.

**8. Have you immigrated to Canada?**

- No, I was born in Canada (skip next question)
- Yes, I immigrated in year \_\_\_\_\_

**9. Which Country did you immigrate from?**


---



---

**10. Approximately what percentage of your family's household after-tax income is spent on food, shelter and clothing?** (Please note this includes all essential expenditures except telephone, Internet, transportation and entertainment)

%       I don't know       I prefer not to answer

**11. Which of the following categories reflects the total INCOME before taxes of all members of your household in 2012?**

- \$19,999 or less       Between \$20,000 and \$39,999
- Between \$40,000 and \$59,999       Between \$60,000 and \$79,999
- Between \$80,000 and \$99,999       \$100,000 or more
- I prefer not to answer

**12. What is the language you first learned at home in your childhood and that you still understand?**

- French       English       Other       French and other
- English and other       Other and other       English and French
- I prefer not to answer

**13. In which region of Ontario do you live?**

- Hamilton – Niagara Peninsula       Kingston – Pembroke
- Kitchener – Waterloo – Barrie       Greater London area
- Muskoka – Kawarthas       Northeast
- Northwest       Greater Ottawa area
- Stratford – Bruce Peninsula       Greater Toronto area
- Windsor – Sarnia






### Parenting Knowledge and Belief Questions

14. Based on what you've heard or know about Canadian laws on physical punishment, please indicate whether you believe the following statements are true or false:






("Physical punishment" includes slapping, spanking, smacking, pinching, hitting, etc.)

	True	False	Unsure
Canada's law prohibits parents from physically punishing children of any age.			
Canada's law allows parents to physically punish children of any age.			
Canada's law allows parents to use physical punishment if the child is capable of learning from it.			
Canada's laws allow parents to use physical punishment as long as they do not use objects or strike the child's head.			
Canada's law allows parents to physically punish children between the ages of 2 and 12.			

15. To what extent do you agree that it is acceptable for a parent to spank or slap their child in each of the following situations?

SITUATION	 Strongly agree	 Somewhat agree	 Somewhat disagree	 Strongly disagree	 Don't know
When the child is disobedient.					
When the child is impolite.					
When the child damages property.					
When the child is violent.					

16. To what extent do you agree with the following statements?

STATEMENT	 Strongly agree	 Somewhat agree	 Somewhat disagree	 Strongly disagree	 Don't know
Slapping / spanking are effective methods to educate a child.					
Slapping / spanking teaches children it is alright to hit others.					
A time-out is an effective way to discipline children.					
Children learn respect through strict discipline.					
Slapping / spanking a child out of love is different than hitting a child out of anger.					
Children develop lasting psychological problems when adults yell or swear at them often.					

Child Discipline Behaviour Questions

17. How often do you do the following? (If you have more than one child under age 6, think of the child you feel is more challenging.)

SITUATION	Never	About once a week or less	2-5 times a week	One or two times a day	More than twice a day	I don't know	I prefer not to answer
Get annoyed with your child for doing something he/she is not supposed to							
Lose your temper when your child doesn't do something you ask him/her to do							
Feel you are having problems managing your child in general							

18. How often have you done each of the following when your child breaks the rules or does something that he/she is not supposed to? (If you have more than one child under age 6, think of the child you feel is more challenging.)

SITUATION	Never	About once a week or less	2-5 times a week	One or two times a day	More than twice a day	I don't know	I prefer not to answer
Tell the child to stop							
Ignore it, do nothing							
Raise your voice, scold							
Calmly discuss the problem with the child							
Slap or spank the child							
Distract the child							
Threaten to spank (but not do it)							
Take away privileges or things							
Put him/her in time-out in another room							
Put him/her in time-out in the same room							

19. What types of information are you looking for regarding disciplining your child?  
(open-ended)

- I don't know     I prefer not to answer



### Parenting Information Sources Questions

20. In the past month, how often have you used the following sources for parenting information?

	Daily	Weekly	Once/month	Never	I don't know
TV					
Newspapers					
Magazines					
Radio					
Internet (information website - parenting, news, health, etc.)					
Facebook					
YouTube					
Twitter					
Pamphlet					
Public library					
Parent-child programs such as Ontario Early Years Centres					
Health care provider (paediatrician, family doctor)					
Public health nurse					
Parenting classes/groups					
Childcare provider or teacher					
Family, friends or colleagues					
Public Health Unit					
Social worker					

21. In the past month, which of the following sources of information influenced the way you handled a parenting situation? (Please check all that apply)

- TV
- Newspapers
- Magazines
- Radio
- Internet (information website - parenting, news, health, etc.)
- Facebook
- YouTube
- Twitter
- Pamphlet
- Public library
- Parent-child programs such as Ontario Early Years Centres
- Health care provider (paediatrician, family doctor)
- Public health nurse
- Parenting classes/groups
- Childcare provider or teacher
- Family, friends or colleagues
- Public Health Unit
- Social worker
- Other (specify)
- I did not change any parenting habits in the past month
- I don't know

22. How likely are you to use the following resources to get information about child discipline in the future:

	Very likely	Somewhat likely	Not very likely	Not at all likely	I don't know
TV					
Newspapers					
Magazines					
Radio					
Internet (information website - parenting, news, health, etc.)					
Facebook					
YouTube					
Twitter					
Pamphlet					
Public library					
Parent-child programs such as Ontario Early Years Centres					
Health care provider (paediatrician, family doctor)					
Public health nurse					
Parenting classes/groups					
Childcare provider or teacher					
Family, friends or colleagues					
Public Health Unit					
Social worker					



by/par health **nexus** santé

[www.beststart.org](http://www.beststart.org)

*This document has been prepared with funds provided by the Government of Ontario. The information herein reflects the views of the authors and does not necessarily reflect the views of the Government of Ontario.*