

# Parents' Common Pitfalls of Discipline

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**Background:** Problems of discipline are common among parents. These may be the results of the parents' pitfalls in disciplining their children.

**Objective:** To find out common pitfalls of parents in disciplining their children.

**Material and Method:** Parents of students with ages ranged between 60-72 months old in Bangkok-Noi district, Bangkok, were selected by random sampling. Total number of 1947 children ages between 60-72 months were recruited. Parents of these children were interviewed with a questionnaire designed to probe into problems in child rearing. There hindered and fifty questionnaires were used for data analyses.

**Results:** Parents had high concerns about problems in discipline their children and needed support from professional personnel. They had limited knowledge and possessed lots of wrong attitude towards discipline. Common pitfalls on the topics were problems in, 1) limit setting 2) rewarding and punishment 3) supervision on children watching TV and bedtime routines.

**Conclusion:** Parents of children with ages 60-72 months old in Bangkok-Noi district, Bangkok, had several common pitfalls in disciplining their children, including attitude, knowledge and practice.

**Keywords:** Pitfalls, Discipline, Children.

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Discipline is the structure that an adult sets up for a child's life designed to allow him or her to fit into the real world, happily and effectively<sup>(1)</sup>. Parents need to discipline their children for several reasons. They use discipline to stop inappropriate behaviors, to teach children a lesson, to teach children appropriate behaviors and to help children to internalize society's values<sup>(2)</sup>. However families often have little knowledge about techniques used in modifying child behavior<sup>(3)</sup>. Pediatricians are in a key position to provide anticipatory guidance about discipline to prevent behavior problems from developing<sup>(1)</sup>.

Chamberlin found that 90% of mother of 2 to 4-year-old children had mild concerns about their children's behaviors. Twenty percent of mothers of 4-year-olds had significant concerns. Most of those concerns had to do with discipline<sup>(4)</sup>.

The objective of this study is to look for pitfalls in disciplining and child rearing for preschool children in Bangkok-Noi district, Bangkok. The study will help parents and mental health personnel who work with children and their families to prevent and to promote psychological development in this crucial period of life.

## Subjects

Parents of the 60-72 month-old children in Bangkok-Noi district, Bangkok were selected by random sampling.

## Methods

The authors collected the names, addresses and numbers of students in schools which had student age between 60-72 months with permission of education authorities of the Bangkok-Noi district. Total number of the students ages 60-72 months was 1947. The number of the samples (n) determined by

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the table from Yamune T (1993)<sup>(5)</sup> was 350 ( $\alpha = 0.05$ ).

The questionnaire for the parents of 60-72 month-old students was developed. The questionnaire was divided into two parts. Part one contained the information about the general family background; part two asked about the attitude and practice of the parents on discipline.

Schools included in this study were selected by random sampling. Parents who were main caretakers of the children were asked to answer the questionnaire. The collected questionnaire was interpreted by pediatricians and a child and adolescent psychiatrist. The common pitfalls in discipline were described.

### Results

From 520 questionnaires sent to the parents, 384 (73.84%) were returned. However, 34 of them were incomplete and were thus excluded. Three hundred and fifty questionnaires were selected for data analysis.

Table 1 and 2 showed demographic characteristics of families included in the study.

Part II of the questionnaire contained 106 questions. Of these, responses to 32 items showed common or interesting pitfalls. They could be classified into 5 groups, i.e., 1) intensity of the problems of discipline 2) pitfalls in general attitude and knowledge 3) pitfalls in reward and punishment techniques 4) pitfalls in setting up limit 5) pitfalls in child rearing practice.

**Table 1.** Demographic characteristics of the families in the study (348 families)

Characteristics	Frequency (n) (%)
1) Main child caretakers	
Mother	238 (68)
Father	74 (21)
Grandparents	17 (5)
Others	21 (6)
2) Marital status of the parents	
Married	294 (84)
Divorced	38 (11)
Other	18 (5)
3) Number of children	
one	132 (37.7)
two	163 (46.6)
more than two	55 (15.7)
4) Total family income (Baht/moth)	
less than 5,000	60 (17.1)
5,000-10,000	143 (40.9)
10,000 -20,000	88 (25.1)
more than 20,000	59 (16.8)
5) Sex of the children in study	
Boy	196 (56)
Girl	154 (44)

**Table 2.** Career, religion and education of parents

Characteristics	Frequency (n)	Mother (%)
1 Parent's career		
employee	194 (55.4)	146 (41.7)
self-employed	52 (14.9)	62 (17.7)
civil service	54 (15.4)	39 (11.1)
house wife	-	95 (27.1)
others	50 (14.3)	8 (2.4)
2 Religion		
Buddhism	326 (93.1)	333 (95.1)
Christianity	1 (0.3)	2 (0.6)
Islam	9 (2.6)	6 (1.7)
Others	14 (4)	9 (2.6)
3 Education		
Grade 6 or lower	115 (32.9)	119 (34.1)
Grade 7-12	146 (41.7)	131 (37.4)
Diploma or higher	89 (25.4)	100 (28.5)

On the aspect of the intensity of problems of discipline, 63.2% felt that they needed help from professional personnel to discipline their children. Almost half (47.1%) had concern with “problems” in disciplining their children, and 35.7% often had disagreement between parents in child rearing.

Regarding the pitfalls in general attitude and knowledge, 91.1% thought that schools were mainly responsible for discipline. Sixty percent thought that children would spontaneously developed more discipline when they grew up. Twenty-eight percent thought that academic achievement was more important than good discipline. Thirteen percent thought that children’s character and discipline depended more on genetics than child rearing patterns. Ten percent thought that children’s character and discipline were “inherited” and could not be changed.

With regard to pitfalls in reward and punishment techniques. Most parents (89.1%) agreed with Thai proverb indicating “If you love your cows, tie them. If you love your children, spank them”. Sixty-five percent did not have any knowledge about “time out” technique. Sixty-four percent admitted that sometimes they did not know how to punish their children properly. Sixty percent thought that spanking was a good technique to punish their children. Forty-six percent “often” punished their children by spanking. Thirty-three percent thought that by praising children, they would be spoiled. Twelve percent believed that material rewards were better than social rewards.

For pitfalls about child rearing practice, three distinctive problems were parents’ supervision on study and play, parents’ supervision on watching TV, and parents’ supervision on bedtime settling. For parents’ supervision on study play; 11.1% of the parents “never” played with their children; 38.4% of the parents “never” tell stories to their children; 66.5% had their children study at home longer than 1 hour a day. For parents’ supervision on watching TV, 38.4% of parents had their children study at home longer than 1 hour a day. Thirty four percent of parents did not control the TV programs their children watched. Furthermore, the average time children watching TV on weekdays was 2.58 hours (SD=1.45) compared to parents’ expected time of 2.19 hours (SD=1.42). Corresponding time for TV watching on weekend were 4.77 hours (SD=2.56) VS to 3.99 hours (SD = 2.05). For parents supervision on bedtime settling practice, percentage of children went to bed after 9 pm on weekdays was 26.5% and on weekend was 53.1%. Three percent of children woke up after 7 am on weekdays

while 63.7% woke up after 7 am on weekend.

## Discussion

The majority of families were from low socioeconomic status. About three-fourths of parents graduated from high school or lower. Half had income less than 10,000 bahts a month. However, they still had good family planning, i.e., 84.3% of them have only one or two children. This might represent the true pattern of families in suburban areas of Bangkok.

The results show that parents’ pitfalls of disciplining children (ages 5 to 6 years old) were common. Most parents were concerned about these problems and required supports from professionals. The most common pitfalls were attitudes and knowledge of the parents. They had limited knowledge about child development, both on behavior and emotional parts. Most (91.1%) thought that school plays the most important role in disciplining their children, while more than a half (60.3%) thought that their children’s discipline will spontaneously improve when they grew up. Some blamed this issue on their genetic. These misunderstandings could lead to a low motivation and or to play passive role in disciplining their children.

Parents might have unrealistic expectations on schools to take a role in discipline. Adequate discipline for children takes time, requires close monitoring, adequate supervision and early start. Thus, parents are the most important persons while homes are the most important place for discipline.

“Limit setting” is the heart of discipline. Parents need to setup “house rules” for their children to follow. Usually, house rules concern family routine schedule, responsibility, duties and rights. Children are encouraged to develop responsibility, self-control, self-esteem and social skills when house rules are consistently applied and monitoring<sup>(6)</sup>. However this study indicates that most parents (81.1%) kept house rules inconsistently or never had one. About half worried that if their children cried frequently because of limit setting, it could turn into habit of frequently crying or it could disturb children’s mental health. These misunderstandings might affect consistency and ability to set limit to their children.

Parents also lacked knowledge about behavior modification techniques such as rewarding and punishment, which are important tools for discipline. Even though “time out” technique which is a basic but effective method to control children behavior<sup>(1,7)</sup>, more than half did not have any knowledge of it. Corporal punishment is less effective than “time out” and may

be dangerous to child health<sup>(1, 6)</sup>. However most parents had positive attitudes towards corporal punishment. Nearly half (46%) often punished their children by spanking. Parents' limited knowledge of appropriate rewarding and punishment techniques could lead to corporal punishment.

In child rearing practices, common pitfalls were found in 3 areas, i.e., 1) parents' concerns on children's academic achievement and play, 2) parents' supervision on watching television, and 3) parents' supervision on setting sleep and wake up time. Cognitive development of preschool children are in "preoperation stage". At this age, children learn from interaction with people or environment through "play"<sup>(8)</sup>. However, several parents had their children spending a lot of time studying at home. A number of them never told stories (38.4%) or played (11.1%) with their children.

Children are particularly vulnerable to messages conveyed through TV, which could influence their perception and behaviors<sup>(9, 10)</sup>. Research has shown primary negative health effects if TV watching on violence and aggressive behavior, sexuality, substance use and abuse patterns<sup>(10, 11)</sup>, self-image, dieting and obesity<sup>(10, 12)</sup>. The American Academy of Pediatrics recommended that children's total media time should be limited to no more than 1 to 2 hours of quality programming per day<sup>(10, 13)</sup>. This study showed that the parents allowed too much time for their children to watch TV, both on weekdays (mean = 2.19 hrs./day) and on weekend (mean = 3.99 hrs./day). Moreover time children really spent on viewing TV was even longer than what their parents expected. The difference between time children watched TV and time their parents expected was statistically significant at  $P < .0001$ . This indicates that parent did not or could not control their children to watch television. The situations were more serious when one third of them (31.1%) admitted that they did not limit TV watching time at all and nearly the same number (34%) did not control the TV programs their children watched.

Bedtime settling practice was another pitfall on child rearing. Children need parents' involvement or close supervision during their first 6 to 7 years old to develop sleep hygiene<sup>(14)</sup>. Parents have to regulate "bedtime activities" or "bedtime routines" and consistently apply the rules. But only one-third of the parents in this study (34%) had did so. Majority of the children had inconsistent bedtime that depended on the school activities. On school day, only one-fourth

(26.5%) of children went to bed after 9 pm, but on weekend, more than half (53.1%) went to bed after 9 pm with 17.7% went to bed after 10 pm. Such factor clearly had an impact on the children's wake up time. On school days only 3.6% of the children woke up after 7 am while the number on weekend rose to 73.7%. Since preschool children still need lots of sleep, (average 9.5-11.5 hours per day)<sup>(15)</sup>, these children may have higher risk for sleep deprivation or other sleep problems such as bedtime struggles.

### Conclusion

Parents of 5-6-year old preschool children in Bangkok-Noi district had several common pitfalls in discipline and child rearing. Mainly, these pitfalls concern attitude and knowledge which could have negative impact on their motivation and potential to set limit and control their children.

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### ข้อผิดพลาดที่พบบ่อยของผู้ปกครองในการสร้างวินัยในเด็ก

ชาตรี วิฑูรชาติ, ฐิติพร ฟางสะอาด, ศุภมิตร เชาว์อารีย์, ฐิติวี แก้วพรสวรรค์, พนม เกตุมาน, สุชีรา ภัทรายุทธวรรตน์

**ที่มา:** ปัญหาการสร้างวินัยในเด็กเป็นปัญหาที่ผู้ปกครองให้ความสำคัญและพบบ่อย ซึ่งอาจเกิดจากความผิดพลาดของผู้ปกครองในการฝึกวินัยเด็ก

**วัตถุประสงค์:** เพื่อค้นหาข้อผิดพลาดที่พบบ่อยของผู้ปกครองในการสร้างวินัยในเด็ก

**วัสดุและวิธีการ:** ผู้ปกครองซึ่งเป็นผู้เลี้ยงดูหลักของเด็กนักเรียนอายุ 60 - 72 เดือน จำนวน(n) 350 คน ซึ่งถูกเลือกโดยการสุ่มตัวอย่างจากจำนวนทั้งหมด (N)1,947 คน ( $\alpha = 0.05$ ) ในเขตบางกอกน้อย กรุงเทพฯ ได้ตอบแบบสอบถามเกี่ยวกับทัศนคติ ความรู้ และการปฏิบัติจริงในการสร้างวินัยในเด็กนักเรียนดังกล่าว ข้อมูลที่ได้ถูกวิเคราะห์โดยกุมารแพทย์และจิตแพทย์เด็กและวัยรุ่น 3 คน

**ผลการศึกษา:** ปัญหาการสร้างวินัยในเด็กยังเป็นปัญหาที่พบบ่อยมาก ผู้ปกครองยังมีข้อผิดพลาดเกี่ยวกับทัศนคติและความรู้ในอัตราสูง ทำให้มีข้อผิดพลาดบ่อยในการกำหนดขอบเขตพฤติกรรมของเด็ก การปรับพฤติกรรมโดยการให้รางวัลและการลงโทษ ขาดการสร้างวินัยที่เหมาะสมในการดูโทรทัศน์ และกิจวัตรการนอน

**สรุป:** ผู้ปกครองของเด็กวัย 60-72 เดือน ในเขตบางกอกน้อย ยังคงมีข้อผิดพลาดที่พบบ่อยในการสร้างวินัยเด็กจำนวนมาก และในอัตราร้อยละที่สูง ทั้งด้านทัศนคติ ความรู้ และการปฏิบัติ

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