

*Section: Preliminary studies in PPT***POSITIVE PSYCHOTHERAPY-BASED FAMILY EDUCATION PROGRAM FOR PARENTS OF CHILDREN AGED 0-6: DEVELOPMENT AND APPLICATION****Elif B. Unsal Ozberk**

PhD, Senior Lecturer in Psychology at Buckinghamshire New University, Certified positive psychotherapist, Buckinghamshire (UK)

Email: elif.ozberk@bucks.ac.uk

ORCID: [0000-0003-3605-3983](https://orcid.org/0000-0003-3605-3983)

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Abstract

Positive Psychotherapy (PPT) provides a valuable framework for supporting family relationships by focusing on individuals' capacities, achieving balance across life domains, and harnessing the transformative potential of conflict. In response to the need for contemporary, attachment-oriented parent education programs, the Positive Psychotherapy-Based Family Education Program for Parents of Children Aged 0-6 was developed. The program consists of four sessions that address parent-child bonding, understanding and expressing emotions, building cooperation without relying on rewards or punishments, and fostering self-awareness in parents. Grounded in the theoretical principles of PPT, it aims to equip parents with knowledge and skills that align with the evolving needs of children and families today. A previous empirical study examining the effectiveness of the program demonstrated improvements in parenting self-efficacy and reductions in parental stress and authoritarian attitudes. This article presents the conceptualization, structure, and practical application of the Positive Psychotherapy-Based 0-6 Age Family Education Program, highlighting its contribution to modern practice within the framework of Positive Psychotherapy.

Keywords: Positive Psychotherapy, family education, attachment-based parenting, Balance Model, parenting skills, self-regulation

Introduction

Rapid social, economic, and technological changes have profoundly reshaped the dynamics of family life (Levinson, 1986; Yavuzer, 1996). In this evolving context, traditional approaches to parenting—often characterised by reward and punishment systems—have become increasingly insufficient in fostering secure attachment, emotional awareness, and cooperative relationships between parents and children (Duruhan & Şad, 2008; Nelsen, Lott, & Glenn, 1993). There is a growing recognition of the need for parent education programs that are holistic,

strength-based, and culturally sensitive (Grusec & Davidov, 2007).

Positive Psychotherapy (PPT), developed by Nossrat Peseschkian (1987; 2009), offers a comprehensive and transcultural framework well-suited to this need. By emphasising the development of individuals' capacities, the establishment of balance across key areas of life, and the cultivation of hope, PPT provides a rich theoretical foundation for interventions aimed at enhancing parenting skills and family wellbeing (Henrichs, 2012).

While PPT has been applied effectively in clinical, educational, and organisational settings

(Cope, 2014), its integration into structured parent education programs has remained limited. To address this gap, the Positive Psychotherapy-Based Family Education Program for Parents of Children Aged 0–6 was developed. Designed for parents of young children, the program incorporates PPT principles to support parents in building strong emotional bonds with their children, understanding and responding to emotional needs, fostering cooperation without coercive strategies, and strengthening self-awareness and self-care practices.

This article introduces the development, structure, and theoretical foundations of the Positive Psychotherapy-Based Family Education Program. By presenting the program's framework and rationale, it aims to contribute to the growing body of practice-oriented applications of Positive Psychotherapy.

Methodology

2.1. Theoretical Background

Positive Psychotherapy (PPT), developed by Nossrat Peseschkian in the late 1960s, presents a transcultural, resource-oriented model for understanding human behaviour, conflict, and growth (Peseschkian, 1987; Peseschkian, 2009). Unlike pathology-centred approaches, PPT emphasises individuals' capacities and focuses on activating inner resources through a balance of various life domains: body and senses, achievement and work, contact and relationships, and meaning and future (Henrichs, 2012; Cope, 2014).

Central to PPT is the concept of capacities, classified as primary (e.g., love, trust, hope) and secondary (e.g., punctuality, politeness, cleanliness) (Peseschkian, 1987). According to PPT, challenges in life and relationships often arise from conflicts between these capacities, unmet expectations, or imbalances across life domains (Peseschkian, 2016). Healing attempts to facilitate an awareness of these natural capacities and tensions, moving people toward a position of balance and self-governance (Grözinger, 2011). Furthermore, Positive Psychotherapy's (PPT) self-help concept emphasizes empowering individuals by educating them with techniques and attitudes that can be utilized independently after therapy (Peseschkian, 1987). This is especially relevant in family education because it provides parents with not only information but also

methodologies that foster self-reflection and resilience (Cope, 2014).

The Positive Psychotherapy-Based Family Education Program for Parents of Children Aged 0–6 applies these theoretical bases:

The Balance Model offers a highly structured format for sessions, prompting parents to consider their children's needs in various aspects of their lives, not just behavioral issues (Peseschkian, 2009).

The concept of capacities forms the basis for an interpretation strategy that helps decipher children's behavior, allowing parents to look beyond surface impressions to acknowledge internal competencies and needs (Grusec & Davidov, 2007).

The self-help principle underpins the interactive format of the sessions, enabling parents to internalize and apply PPT viewpoints after the program duration (Henrichs, 2012).

Grounded in Positive Psychotherapy, the program offers a culturally adaptable, strengths-based approach that respects parents' and children's internal strengths and developmental processes.

2.2. Development of the Program

The development of the Positive Psychotherapy-Based Family Education Program emerged from the observed need for a holistic, resource-oriented approach to parenting education (Duruhan & Şad, 2008; Yavuzer, 1996). Recognising the limitations of traditional behaviour-focused models, the program was designed to emphasise emotional connection, inner capacities, and self-regulation — aligned with the theoretical foundations of Positive Psychotherapy (Peseschkian, 1987; Cope, 2014).

The curriculum development process was guided by the Taba-Tyler model of curriculum design, which prioritises needs assessment, clear objectives, and logical content sequencing (Taba, 1962).

2.3. Needs Analysis

A review of the literature, complemented by preliminary consultations with parents and educators, revealed a consistent demand for structured support in several key areas of parenting. One of the most pressing needs identified was guidance on building stronger emotional bonds with children, particularly through the lens of early attachment theory, which emphasizes the long-term developmental

significance of secure parent-child relationships (Bowlby, 1988).

In addition to attachment, parents expressed difficulty in understanding and managing their children's emotional expressions. This aligns with research emphasising the importance of emotional coaching and meta-emotion awareness in fostering healthy parent-child communication and emotional regulation (Gottman, Katz, & Hooven, 1996).

A further concern was the widespread reliance on behavioral strategies, such as rewards and punishments, and a desire to find more respectful and cooperative methods to encourage positive behavior. Educational psychologists have long advocated for parenting approaches that emphasise mutual respect, intrinsic motivation, and empathy rather than control and compliance (Nelsen, Lott, & Glenn, 1993).

Lastly, both the literature and consultation feedback underscore the importance of supporting parents' emotional regulation and self-care, particularly in managing stress and modeling healthy coping strategies for their children (Siegel, 2012).

These findings indicated that an effective parenting program should move beyond behavioural management and instead cultivate a deeper understanding of emotional needs, both those of children and of parents themselves, within a developmental and relational framework (Grusec & Davidov, 2007).

2.4. Defining Objectives

Drawing upon Positive Psychotherapy's Balance Model and capacity model (Peseschkian, 1987), the program's objectives were framed to:

Enhance parents' capacity for emotional attunement and secure attachment (Siegel, 2012),

Increase awareness of emotional needs underlying behaviours (Gottman et al., 1996),

Promote cooperative problem-solving strategies within the family (Nelsen et al., 1993),

Strengthen parental self-awareness, self-care, and resilience (Cope, 2014).

The overarching goal was to support parents in becoming "good enough" caregivers — attuned, responsive, and emotionally available, rather than perfect or controlling (Winnicott, 1965).

2.5. Structuring the Program

The program was structured into four thematic sessions, each lasting approximately 90 minutes. Each session incorporated psychoeducation, group discussion, experiential exercises, and reflective homework activities, aligning with adult learning principles that emphasise experience-based, participative learning and self-directed growth (Knowles, 1980).

The first session, "Building Bond with the Child", focused on core concepts from attachment theory (Bowlby, 1988) and basic neuroscience related to emotional development and the integration of right- and left-brain functions (Siegel, 2012). The goal was to support parents in recognising the emotional signals underlying children's behaviours and developing sensitive, attuned responses.

In the second session, "Understanding and Expressing Emotions", the emphasis shifted to emotional literacy and the importance of effective communication. Drawing on the meta-emotion framework (Gottman, Katz, & Hooven, 1996), this session explored emotions as internal guides that signal unmet needs. Parents were encouraged to validate both their own and their children's emotional expressions and to reflect on how family patterns influence emotional regulation.

The third session, "Cooperation Without Reward or Punishment", introduced respectful, proactive parenting strategies rooted in mutual trust and autonomy. Participants examined common coercive approaches such as reward systems and punitive discipline, and were instead guided to use intrinsic motivation techniques, empathy-based boundary setting, and collaborative problem-solving (Nelsen, Lott, & Glenn, 1993).

The final session, "Building Bond with the Self", encouraged deep parental self-reflection through the lens of Positive Psychotherapy's Balance Model (Peseschkian, 1987).

Accepting individual strengths, coping capacities, and intrinsic potential for advancing greater family relationships reinforced avoidance patterns—whether somatic, emotional, or relational — (Peseschkian, 2009).

During the course, the central instruments and methods of Positive Psychotherapy were specially designed for application in a family education setting. These were metaphorical narratives to foster understanding and

reframing (Peseschkian, 2016), Balance Model exercises to determine personal equilibrium, guided reflection activities to identify primary and secondary capacities, and directed home assignments to promote the long-term adoption of learning practices into daily parenting activities.

Results: Application of the Program

The Positive Psychotherapy-Based Family Education Program for Parents of Children Aged 0–6 was designed to be accessible, interactive, and adaptable to different delivery formats (Knowles, 1980). In its initial implementation, the program was offered through online group sessions, a modality chosen for both its practicality during the COVID-19 pandemic and its ability to reach a geographically diverse group of participants (Wang et al., 2020).

3.1. Format and Delivery

The program participants were parents of children between the ages of 0 and 6 years, who were invited through open invitations. A total of 34 parents took part in the program during the first phase (Zenginal & Unsal Ozberk, 2023). The program was organized into four sessions, each lasting approximately 90 minutes, and was held weekly for four consecutive weeks. The sessions were held online via secure video conferencing programs to enhance accessibility and continuity amidst the COVID-19 pandemic (Wang et al., 2020).

Every session followed a standard pedagogical model founded on adult learning theory principles:

Psychoeducation (20–30 minutes): Basic principles were delivered via short lectures, visual aids, and explanatory metaphors to enhance understanding (Cope, 2014).

Group Reflection (20 minutes): Participants shared personal experiences, connected theoretical frameworks with real-world application, and explored emotional themes (Brookfield, 1986).

Experiential Segment (30 minutes): This included interactive techniques such as guided imagery, small-group work, and storytelling, rooted in Positive Psychotherapy's metaphorical tradition (Peseschkian, 2016).

Structured Home Assignment (10 minutes): Activities such as journaling, active listening, or observing personal balance were assigned to

integrate learning into parenting practice (Knowles, 1980).

3.2. Educational Tools and Techniques

The Positive Psychotherapy-Based Family Education Program for Parents of Children Aged 0–6 integrated a range of experiential methods drawn from Positive Psychotherapy, providing parents with opportunities to deepen their understanding of both themselves and their children. One of the fundamental methods employed was the use of Balance Model exercises, which prompted parents to reflect on their allocation of time and energy across the four areas of life distinguished in Positive Psychotherapy: physical well-being, professional achievement, interpersonal relationships, and the pursuit of meaning in life. This contemplation also helped the parents evaluate how their children's needs could be met more evenly in these areas (Peseschkian, 1987).

Another crucial technique employed was capacity reflection, where participants engaged in guided group discussions to review both their capacities and those of their children, covering both first-order and second-order dimensions. Such methodology facilitated an appreciation of dormant strengths and values, enabling parents to better decode behavioral challenges as expressions of internal conflict or inadequately deployed capacities (Peseschkian, 2009).

Consistent with the humanistic and transcultural foundation of Positive Psychotherapy, the program incorporated metaphorical storytelling as a therapeutic and educational tool. Storytelling was utilised in the sessions to convey complicated emotional and relational dynamics in a way that was both cognitively clear and emotionally engaging. In this way, participants were assisted in externalising and reframing their difficulties within a positive and culturally adaptive narrative schema (Peseschkian, 2016).

Finally, **emotion mapping** turned into a reflective and visual exercise. Through this exercise, parents were able to improve their ability to recognise, categorise, and validate the broad array of emotions that they, as well as their children, feel. By examining emotional cues, unmet needs, and relationships within the family, subjects could gain a deeper sense of

emotional literacy and empathic sensitivity (Gottman, Katz, & Hooven, 1996).

3.3. Group Dynamics and Facilitation

The program placed strong emphasis on creating a relational atmosphere rooted in safety, trust, and mutual respect. From the beginning, facilitators worked with participants to establish clear group norms—emphasising confidentiality, non-judgment, and the value of diverse parenting experiences. Drawing on person-centred principles, facilitators modelled unconditional positive regard, showing empathy and deep acceptance of each participant's emotional reality (Rogers, 1961).

Sessions were structured, but flexibility remained a key component of facilitation. Group leaders adapted content in real-time to address participants' emerging concerns, adjust discussions, or deepen certain exercises as needed. This responsive style of facilitation reflected the belief that learning is most effective when it is relevant and emotionally resonant (Brookfield, 1986).

Facilitators did not act as instructors in the traditional sense, but rather as guides, encouraging reflection, asking open-ended questions, and promoting peer learning through shared stories and insights. This dynamic enabled a genuine emotional connection between participants, further reinforcing the program's core messages.

Discussion

4.1. Challenges and Adaptations

Delivering the program online entailed benefits and drawbacks. Although more accessible, facilitators had to implement strategies to foster engagement, including using break rooms for brief discussions and incorporating interactive visual content to maintain attention (Wang et al., 2020).

Participant feedback stressed the value of the interactive nature and the open, supportive environment developed among the group. Several participants suggested increasing the number of sessions to facilitate a deeper exploration of the issues addressed (Zenginal & Unsal Ozberk, 2023).

4.2. Previous Evaluation Study

The evaluation of the Positive Psychotherapy-Based Family Education Program for parents of

young children in the 0–6 age group was conducted with a mixed-methods research design (Zenginal & Unsal Ozberk, 2023). The quasi-experimental pre-test/post-test design was complemented by qualitative feedback in order to evaluate the effectiveness of the program (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011) with 34 parents of young children. The qualitative feedback was gathered through open-ended written reflections collected after the final session, where participants were invited to describe changes in their parenting approach, emotional awareness, and communication with their children. These responses were thematically analysed to identify recurring patterns and personal experiences related to the program's impact.

Findings indicated that participation in the program enhanced perceived parenting self-efficacy (Bandura, 1977; Caprara et al., 2004) and parental awareness, and reduced parental stress and authoritarian attitudes, and the participants also reported qualitative change in emotional attunement to children and self-awareness of parenting behaviour (Zenginal & Unsal Ozberk, 2023).

The findings presented herein provide initial validation of the program's effectiveness in promoting positive parenting outcomes within the framework of Positive Psychotherapy. This article builds on the discourse by offering a comprehensive overview of the theoretical basis, development process, and real-world implementation of the program, thereby contributing to the advancement of Positive Psychotherapy principles in family education (Zenginal & Unsal Ozberk, 2023).

4.3. Reflections and Future Directions

The formulation and application of the Positive Psychotherapy-Based Family Education Program highlighted several key strengths and areas for future development.

A key strength of the program lies in the underpinning by principles of Positive Psychotherapy, namely capacities, balance within and between areas of life, and the self-help principle (Henrichs, 2012; Peseschkian, 2009). The theoretical underpinning provided parents with an explanatory and empowering model that helped them not only understand their children's acting out but also their underlying feelings. The emphasis on strengths rather than deficits was particularly well-

received by participants, who reported increased hope, competence, and a greater sense of affiliation with their parental roles (Gottman et al., 1996; Grusec & Davidov, 2007).

The program's structure, incorporating psychoeducation, experiential activities, and reflective practices, was effective in supporting high engagement levels. Parents valued the theory-practice balance that enabled them to learn new concepts and approaches. Furthermore, the program's capacity for online delivery means it can be effectively delivered across various geographic and cultural settings (Wang et al., 2020).

Despite this, several challenges were noted. A subset of participants expressed a preference for an extended program duration, suggesting that while four sessions proved influential, they may not have adequately facilitated a thorough exploration of the intricate emotional aspects associated with parenting (Zenginal & Unsal Ozberk, 2023). This finding aligns with existing literature that posits that prolonged interventions are likely to produce more enduring modifications in parenting attitudes and behaviours (Gardner, Burton, & Klimes, 2006).

Looking forward, there is tremendous potential to increase the scope and implementation of the program. Some potential future directions are:

- tailoring the program to address the unique requirements of particular groups, e.g., adoptive parents and parents of special-needs children (Siegel, 2012);
- creating culturally aware adaptations of the program tailored to various geographical areas (Henrichs, 2012; Peseschkian, 1987);
- emphasizing the research of intergenerational patterns, this study examines the influence of parents' previous attachment experiences (Bowlby, 1988; Fonagy et al., 2002);
- longitudinal studies to ascertain the sustainability of the program's effect over a duration of time (Löfgren et al., 2017).

In summary, the Positive Psychotherapy-Based Family Education Program represents a significant step toward enriching family education practice with the profundity, hope,

and humanity inherent in Positive Psychotherapy (Peseschkian, 2009).

Conclusions

In the current times, characterized by complexity and rapid change, good parenting involves more than behavioral management; it demands intense emotional engagement, resilience, and synchronized management of life and relationships (Gottman et al., 1996; Siegel, 2012). Positive Psychotherapy-Based Family Education Program fulfils this requirement by providing parents with a structured forum to enhance bonding with children, increase emotional awareness, and foster collaborative and respectful family relationships.

Following the principles of Positive Psychotherapy, the program outlines how clinical models, such as the Balance Model, capacity development, and self-help principles, can be effectively translated into preventive and educational work with families (Peseschkian, 2009; Cope, 2014). By enhancing their recognition of inner strength and building balance in central areas of life, parents are better equipped to facilitate their children's growth while simultaneously strengthening their inner resilience.

Preliminary results suggest that the program has a positive impact on both parental skills and knowledge, while also fostering healthier and more peaceful parent-child relationships (Gardner, Burton, & Klimes, 2006; Zenginal & Unsal Ozberk, 2023).

Through the explanation of the program's structure, its theoretical underpinnings, and its practical implementation, this article contributes to the further incorporation of Positive Psychotherapy into general psychoeducational frameworks (Henrichs, 2012). Future activities will be directed toward expanding the program's availability, adapting it to various cultural environments, and providing ongoing support to parents in developing their children's skills (Peseschkian, 1987).

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