

# Putting Research to Work for Military Families



Focus:  
Civilian

## Wait Until Your Mother Gets Home! Mothers' and Fathers' Discipline Strategies

Hallers-Haalboom, E. T., Groeneveld, M. G., van Berkel, S. R., Endendijk, J. J., van der Pol, L. D., Bakermans-Kranenburg, M. J., & Mesman, J. (2015). Wait until your mother gets home! Mothers' and fathers' discipline strategies *Social Development*, 25(1), 82-98. doi:10.1111/sode.12130

**SUMMARY:** Fathers have become increasingly involved in parenting; however, research suggests that mothers may now be primarily responsible for child discipline. Discipline strategies were observed in two-parent, two-child households in the Netherlands. Results indicate that parent gender and child age, and less so child gender, significantly impact parents' discipline strategies and amount of discipline provided.

### KEY FINDINGS:

- Mothers used more verbal (e.g., telling a child “no”), physical (e.g., holding a child’s arm), and re-directive (e.g., focusing a child on a new game) responses to child noncompliance, while fathers used more permissive (e.g., letting a child misbehave) responses to child noncompliance.
- In response to noncompliance, parents used more verbal and re-directive responses for older children and more physical and permissive responses for younger children.
- Parents’ discipline strategies were unrelated to child gender, except that mothers used more physical responses with boys compared to fathers.

### IMPLICATIONS FOR MILITARY PROFESSIONALS:

Military professionals could:

- Collaborate with programs for military families to reach parents and emphasize the importance of and encourage involvement in parent education classes for both mothers and fathers
- Attend trainings about parenting during the deployment cycle to enhance their ability to support military parents struggling with child discipline during that time

### IMPLICATIONS FOR PROGRAMS:

Programs could:

- Educate military parents on effective discipline strategies for children of different age groups
- Provide Service members information regarding ways to balance parenting responsibilities and military duties

### IMPLICATIONS FOR POLICIES:

Policies could:

- Promote parenting programs that work with military parents to learn to apply developmentally appropriate discipline strategies with their children
- Recommend education for service providers working with military families around the possible effects of parent gender and child age on parental discipline strategies

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## METHODS

- Families were recruited via postal mail for a larger longitudinal study with a 31% response rate.
- Data were gathered via home-based family observations and parent questionnaires.
- This study focused on the results of a task where parents ask children not to touch toys; only families with complete data and child noncompliance during observation were included.
- Associations between parent and child gender, child birth order, and discipline strategies were examined.

## PARTICIPANTS

- The sample included 242 two-parent families with two children from the Netherlands.
- Younger children had to be approximately one year old ( $M = 1.00$ ,  $SD = 0.30$ ), and older children had to be approximately three years old ( $M = 3.00$ ,  $SD = 0.30$ ) for families to participate.
- Families with two boys (29%), two girls (23%), or a girl and boy (48%) were included.

## LIMITATIONS

- Although race and ethnicity data were not reported, the article's limitations section stated that parents were mostly White and well-educated, limiting generalizability to more diverse samples.
- Parents may have responded differently when disciplining children during observation in order to present what they believe is the most positive type of parenting or discipline.
- The observed task requires children to inhibit responses, and this ability develops after one year of age, possibly contributing to more permissive parental responses with younger children.

## AVENUES FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Future research could:

- Examine parental discipline strategies in more diverse samples, such as families from different racial or ethnic backgrounds and families with varying socioeconomic status
- Explore the effects of child age on use and effectiveness of parental discipline strategies
- Investigate differences in discipline strategies among families with single parents

## ASSESSING RESEARCH THAT WORKS



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