



# Nonviolent resistance to support professional practices with foster families, families and schools

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## Title: Nonviolent resistance to support professional practices with foster families, families and schools

**COUNTRY/REGION:** Belgium

**ENTITY:** Foster Care Flanders

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### **DESCRIPTION OF THE GOOD PRACTICE:**

**Target group:** Professionals who work with foster families, although the approach is also applicable for professionals who work with families in general, schools and the broader society.

**Objectives:** The nonviolent resistance (NVR) approach has been adapted to help foster parents, parents, and teachers cope with violent, self-destructive and other forms of disruptive behaviour in children and adolescents.

**Intervention structure:** In foster care we developed a manualized/protocolled intervention for foster parents who take care of children with externalizing problem behaviour. It consists of 10 sessions. Treatment checklists are used to evaluate treatment integrity. Other manualized interventions for parents with children/adolescents with different kinds of problem behaviour are described in literature.

**Methodology:** NVR places escalation processes at the centre of attention. The underlying assumption is that parental/caregiver submission and power struggles are mutually enhancing, and that they feed on and are fed by negative feelings. The parents/caregivers/teachers take unilateral steps to not only bring about changes in the child's behaviour but also in the whole interactive cycle. Parents/caregivers/teachers are helped to resist without retaliation and, thereby, to systematically cultivate presence and self-control.

**Costs related:** Professional training and supervision.

**Further information:**

**Resources available:**

### **DIMENSIONS:**

Please make the cross if the good practice meets the proposed items. Also, try to expand the information in each section.



# 1. EVIDENCE OF POSITIVE AND/OR PROMISING RESULTS IN ORDER TO ELIMINATE CORPORAL PUNISHMENT

## **Training/Education**

The program increases the use of positive disciplinary methods for parents and educators/teachers:

- Promoting the positive parenting (promoting positive relationships, care and development the child's capacities, offering recognition and guidance to the child, establishing limits that allow the full development of the child).
- Offering alternative educational strategies to corporal punishment, that promotes democratic family educational model.
- The program promotes to caregivers, the knowledge and skills for protect the children.
- The program promotes a positive dynamic and healthy family relationships.

## **Promotes protection**

- The program will focus attention on children to understand their worries and circumstances.
- The program works on emotional education as a protective factor for violent behavior.

## **Empowerment**

- The practice provides skills for children, promote their resilience and resources to deal with situations of violence.
- The practice promotes and improves parental skills such as: behavior of control and emotional self-regulation.

## **Living environment approach**

- The program has references to the real living environment of parents and children (social environment, living environment, etc.).
- The program takes into account, cultural differences in the intervention.

## **Formal networking**

- The program implies networking and cooperation with other Institutions: with comprehensive services for care, recovering, children reintegration, teens at risk or victims of corporal punishment.
- There is a networking/cooperation with other stakeholders in the local and professional environments.



The program is included in the structure of the national/regional system and it depends on several people.

**Please, detail the elements/components that provide a full explanation about evidence of positive results and/or promising results in each section (Training education, promotes protection...etc.)**

Nonviolent Resistance (NVR) originated in the socio-political sphere where power-disadvantaged groups used protest, public opinion and other tenacious but nonviolent means of resistance to achieve their goals (Sharp, 2005). Recently, the NVR approach has been adapted to help parents cope with violent and self-destructive behaviour in children and adolescents (Omer, 2004, 2011). NVR focuses on four intervention areas (see further):

1. Resistance by presence
2. Prevention of escalation
3. Creating a network of support
4. Reconciliation gestures

NVR places escalation processes at the centre of attention (Omer, Schorr-Sapir, & Weinblatt, 2008). The underlying assumption is that parental submission and power struggles are mutually enhancing, and that they feed on and are fed by negative feelings. The parents take unilateral steps to not only bring about changes in the child's behaviour but also in the whole interactive cycle (Omer, Steinmetz, Carthy, & von Schlippe, 2013). Parents are helped to resist without retaliation and, thereby, to systematically cultivate presence and self-control (Lavi-Levavi, Shachar, & Omer, 2013).

An increasing number of applications of the NVR approach are described in literature, and the target group is widening (Van Holen, Lampo, & Vanderfaeillie, 2011). In Flanders (Dutch speaking part of Belgium) the implementation in foster care and research into effectiveness is documented (Van Holen, Vanderfaeillie, & Omer, 2016; Van Holen, Vanderfaeillie, Omer, 2016). Moreover, promising adaptations and implementations in various contexts such as schools, residential care and the broader community are described (e.g., Omer, 2011; Van Holen et al., 2011). Furthermore, the model has been successfully implemented with parents from various social, ethnic, and religious backgrounds, albeit with adaptations (Omer et al., 2013).



## 2. DATA ON IMPACT OF THE PRACTICE

### Effectiveness of the elimination of corporal punishment

The practice has demonstrated a good impact on:

- The decreases of corporal punishment.
- The increase in positive interactions parents / mother / infant caregivers.
- The increase in timeshare.
- The improvement of communication and resolution of conflicts without using corporal punishment.
- A significant increase in knowledge, skills and confidence of parents or caregivers.
- An improvement of the welfare of the participants.

### Sustainability of the impact

- The effects on the target group are sustainable.

**Please, detail the evidence on data or research about the impact of the practice**

Six peer reviewed articles describe pilot studies in four different countries suggesting that the NVR-approach could be meaningful for different kinds of target groups, such as foster parents, parents of children with OCD, with anxiety disorder, aggressive, violent and controlling behavior, parents of adults with entitled dependence, and parents of adults with high functioning autism spectrum disorder (Golan, Shilo, & Omer, 2016; Lebowitz, 2013; Lebowitz, Dolberger, Nortov, & Omer, 2012; Lebowitz, Omer, Hermes, & Scahill, 2014; Newman, Fagan, & Webb, 2014; Van Holen, Vanderfaeillie, & Omer, 2016).

Furthermore, four peer-reviewed articles describe controlled trials (one quasi-experimental research design and three randomized controlled trials) that show promising results (Lavi-Levavi, Shachar, & Omer, 2013; Ollefs, von Schlippe, Omer, & Kriz, 2009; Van Holen, Vanderfaeillie, Omer, & Vanschoonlandt, 2016; Weinblatt, & Omer, 2008). Specifically, the intervention results in a decrease in problem behaviour, a decrease in parental stress, parental helplessness and escalatory behaviours, an extension of the supportive network (improvement in perceived practical and emotional support), and more effective parenting behaviour (inter alia less punishment, less harsh punishment). As the follow-up periods in the studies were short (one to three months), no statements can be made about long-term results (sustainability of the impact).

Up to now, the effectiveness of this approach is only researched in family settings. Interesting adaptations to other contexts such as schools, residential settings and the broader community are described (e.g., Omer, 2011; Van Holen, Lampo, & Vanderfaeillie, 2011), but not yet examined for effectiveness.



### 3. COMPREHENSIVE NATURE

Please, tick the items the practice address to:

#### Dimension 1: Social and cultural context towards corporal punishment and alternative methods (including MEDIA analysis)

- The program promotes support and guidance to parents in developing a responsible parenthood that will reduce corporal punishment.
- The program supports teachers and school support staff in improving their skills and management skills of non-violent learning methods.
- It involves parents and tutors through established participatory Organizations (AMPA and others), prevention and elimination of corporal punishment.
- The practice promotes the child-youth movement through the creation and / or consolidation of representative organizations in communities.

#### Dimension 2: Legal framework conditions and other procedural, judicial frameworks related with the implementation of the law

- The practice responds to the objectives of education and social reintegration provided by law.
- It is consistent with the existing legal framework for protection of violence against children and teenagers, to ban explicitly corporal punishment.

#### Dimension 3: Awareness and training efforts concerning corporal punishment and alternative methods:

- The program raises awareness about the importance in eliminating corporal punishment.
- The practice provides training about corporal punishment elimination methods.

#### Dimension 4: Resources available on positive parenting techniques and complementary knowledge

- The practice provides resources available on positive parenting techniques and complementary knowledge.

**Please, detail the elements/components that provide a full explanation about the dimension addressed**

NVR focuses on four intervention areas:

1. Resistance by presence. Parents/caregivers aim at resisting rather than controlling the child's negative behaviours by manifestations of parental presence. According to the risks and the child's specific problems, Omer (2004, 2011) developed well-documented techniques to increase parental presence in a respectful and nonviolent way, such as:
  - Giving the child a formal written announcement in which the parents/caregivers



declare their intention to resist specific unacceptable behaviours.

- Performing parental 'sit-ins' through which parents/caregivers can express their commitment to change and their dissatisfaction with the current situation. The parents/caregivers enter the child's room, sit down, and announce that they will stay there and wait for the child's proposal to resolve the problem behaviour that triggered the sit-in. The parents/caregivers are asked to remain quiet, and to strictly avoid arguments and provocations. They are prepared in advance to resist various possible reactions, and instructed as to how to end the sit-in and resume normal daily life.
- Documenting violent and aggressive episodes and notifying their support network about these behaviours.
- Telephoning around in reaction to the child's refusal to come home at a specified hour. Parents/caregivers are encouraged to call the child's friends and their parents, telling them that their child has not come home, asking for their help and asking the child's friends to tell their child that they have called to look for him/her. They are rigorously instructed as to how to prevent escalation once the child returns home.

## 2. Prevention of escalation

Parents/caregivers are helped to prevent and halt escalating cycles in a number of ways. They are trained in self-control and emotional regulation. They are helped to recognize escalatory patterns, identify their own and their child's typical reactions and their associated thoughts and feelings. They also learn alternative ways of responding in a non-escalating manner. The principle of delayed response (as illustrated by the statement: 'Strike the iron when it's cold'), and the development of a non-controlling stance (as illustrated by the phrase 'You don't have to win, only to persevere!') are central emphases of the treatment.

## 3. Creating a network of support

Parents/caregivers are helped to activate potential sources of support in their immediate and wider social network such as family, friends, acquaintances and other persons who might be supportive (e.g., professionals, school staff). When possible, a supporters meeting is organized to explain the purpose and principles of the treatment and to discuss in concrete terms how and when they can be of help.

## 4. Reconciliation gestures

Parents/caregivers are encouraged to initiate positive interactions by systematically and cumulatively offering restorative gestures (e.g., signs of appreciation, suggestions for shared activities, symbolic gifts). These gestures are unilateral and unconditional initiatives by the parents/caregivers. They are independent of the child's behaviour and aim at promoting the positive aspects of the parent-child relationship.



## 4. INNOVATION

- The program has an innovative character, or implies innovative aspects (e. g. actual knowledge, new ideas or methodology, etc.).

**Please, detail the elements/components that provide a full explanation about the innovation of the program**

This model introduces a new paradigm of intervention that enforces a form of authority in parents, foster parents, teachers and other caregivers that is based on presence, transparency, positive involvement, support and vigilant care, and which is based on positive parenting strategies. It has been developed during the last 15 years and shows itself to be applicable in broad field of contexts.

## 5.COST-EFFICIENCY

- The cost-efficiency is adequate.
- There are no lower cost alternatives to achieve the same impact.

**Please, detail the elements/components that justify the cost-efficiency of the program/practice**

Literature study combined with a basic training (+/- 5 days) for experienced professionals in the field of family therapy/guidance are sufficient to get started with existing treatment manuals.

## 6. TRANSFERABILITY POTENTIAL

- There is access to the methodology and how the program has been implemented (e. g. process description, manual etc.).
- The program has already been successfully transferred to another region.

The program can be transferred to other frame conditions in international contexts:

- The program does not rely too much on specific aspects of the national/regional system.
- The program does not depend too much on one/few specific professional qualifications and/ or profiles.

- The program can be transferred if the material, program or license are paid.

**Please, detail the elements/components that justify the transferability of the program/practice**

It is a universal concept, which has already been implemented in different countries (Israël, Germany, Belgium, Netherlands, etcetrera) in different cultural settings.  
The program can be transferred immediately. No license has to be paid.



## Literature/references

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