

# The Dark Side Of The Carrot And The Stick

We tend to praise children only when they meet our expectations and punish them when they do not. Hence, it is only natural that children equate their value and acceptance to meeting our expectations. This can be detrimental to their emotional well-being and motivation to study. So how can we enable the child to meet our expectations without using the carrot or the stick?

Roth, Assor, Niemiec, Ryan and Deci (2009) conducted 2 studies of 9<sup>th</sup>-grade Israeli adolescents to compare the parenting practices of [conditional positive regard](#), [conditional negative regard](#), and [autonomy support](#) using data from multiple reporters.

The two reported studies revealed three important findings which were consistent with the [self-determination theory](#) model of internalization.



1. Adolescents' [perceptions of parental control positive regard \(PCPR\)](#) were associated with feelings of internal compulsion ([introjected regulation](#)), which then predicted [suppressive regulation](#) of negative emotions (anger and fear) and grade-focused academic engagement. In other words, children who perceive their parents to show more attention and affection when they do well in their studies, feel compelled to focus rigidly on tests, grades and achievements in order to earn their parents' approval, and they tend to suppress their feelings of anger and fear. They are not interested in learning information that is not directly related to their grade.
2. Adolescents' perceptions of [parental control negative regard \(PCNR\)](#) predicts feelings of resentment toward parents, which then predict [dysregulation](#) of negative emotions and academic disengagement. In other words, children who perceive their parents to withdraw attention and affection when the child fails to act as expected, tend to dislike their parents. They are unable to control their feelings of anger and fear in a positive manner and are not motivated to study.
3. Autonomy support towards negative emotions predicts sense of choice, which then predicts [integrated regulation](#) of negative emotions and interest-focused academic engagement. In other words, parents who are affectionate, encouraging, not overly controlling, provide meaningful rationale while showing understanding for the child's inclination to express a negative emotion were associated with their children's feelings of choice, effective emotional control and interest in exploring academic material regardless of its connection to tests.

Parental Practice	Motivation and affective experience	Behavioural functioning
PCNR →	Amotivation; resentment toward parents →	Lack of action; dysregulation
PCPR →	Controlled motivation; feelings of internal compulsion (an index of introjections) →	Constricted, pressured behaviour
PAS →	Autonomous motivation; experience of choice (an index of identification) →	Exploration and curiosity

PCNR = parental conditional negative regard

PCPR = parental conditional positive regard

PAS = parental autonomy support

These findings suggest that even parents' use of conditional positive or negative regard as a socialisation practice has adverse emotional and academic consequences, relative to autonomy support.

Hence, it would be pertinent to avoid using positive or negative regard when teaching children but focus on giving autonomy support.

The following are suggestions on how we can do that:

- Refrain from giving more attention and affection than usual when children enacts desired behaviours or attributes that meet your expectations and provide less attention and affection than usual when children do not. For example,
  - Do not ignore the child when he or she does poorly in school
  - Do not show more appreciation than usual when the child studies hard
- Acknowledge and relate to children's perspective and feelings.
- Provide a rationale and intrinsic value demonstration to help children understand the value of the behaviours for themselves. The sense of choice and lack of internal pressure enable children to act in non-constricted and exploratory ways, responding to information in a curious and non-defensive way.
- Convey your expectations in ways that allow a sense of choice about behavioural enactment
- Do not pressure children to ignore their negative feelings.
- When it is not appropriate for the child to express a negative emotion, provide a meaningful explanation while showing understanding for the child's inclination to express the emotion.
- Be affectionate and encouraging without being overly controlling or restrictive.

Key Definitions:

Autonomy-supportive	Environments that minimize the salience of external incentives and threats, avoid controlling language, and acknowledge the learners' frame of reference (Black & Deci, 2000; Ryan & Connell, 1989).
Dysregulation	Experience emotions but not being able to regulate those emotions (Ryan, Deci, Grolnick, & La Guardia, 2006). That is, the behavioural tendencies inherent in the emotions (e.g., James, 1890) will be expressed without the children's intention (Deci, 1980).
Integrated regulation	Occurs when the value of the activity has been assimilated with other aspects of self and is experienced as deeply internalised and autonomous.
Introjected regulation	Involves taking in a contingency or value or regulation but not accepting them as their own (e.g. planning to attend college to avoid feelings of guilt). Controlled motivation accompanied by feelings of inner compulsion, based on self-esteem being contingent upon approval and worth that had previously been applied by others (Roth et al., 2009).
Parental Conditional Negative Regard (PCNR)	Withdrawing attention and affection when the child fails to act as expected.
Parental Conditional Positive Regard (PCPR)	Providing more attention and affection than usual when the child enact desired behaviours.
Self-determination theory (SDT)	A macro-theory of human motivation concerned with the development and functioning of personality within social contexts. The theory focuses on the degree to which human behaviors are volitional or self-determined - that is, the degree to which people endorse their actions at the highest level of reflection and engage in the actions with a full sense of choice("Self-determination theory: An approach to human motivation and personality," 1996-2008). See <a href="http://www.psych.rochester.edu/SDT/theory.php">http://www.psych.rochester.edu/SDT/theory.php</a>
Suppressive regulation	Avoiding or minimising experience of negative emotions

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