

EFFECTS OF THE *BECOMING A LOVE AND LOGIC*[®] PARENT TRAINING PROGRAM ON PARENTS' PERCEPTIONS OF THEIR CHILDREN'S BEHAVIOR AND THEIR OWN PARENTAL COMPETENCE: A PRELIMINARY INVESTIGATION

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Introduction

Over the past thirty years, severe disruptive behavior among American youth has evolved from a relatively minor concern, shared by only a few educators and parents, to a major day-to-day crisis experienced by many. Veteran teachers continually report that the students entering their classrooms today are vastly more challenging than the ones they taught as recently as a decade ago. Clearly, both educators and the general public view child discipline as one of the most challenging and important issues facing today's schools (*American Educator*, 1995-96; Elan, Rose & Gallup, 1996; Lewis, Sugai, & Colvin, 1998). Mirroring these concerns has been research documenting significant increases in the frequency of behaviors ranging from minor disruptions (Walker, Colvin & Ramsey, 1995) to fatal violence (Koop & Lundberg, 1992; Rutherford & Nelson, 1995).

There is no doubt that educators and parents are experiencing ever-increasing needs for practical ways of preventing discipline problems, teaching pro-social behavior, and promoting responsibility. Research has shown that punishment-based approaches actually increase disruptive behaviors (Lewis, Sugai, & Colvin, 1998; Mayer & Sulzer-Azaroff, 1991). Further, approaches that fail to provide clear behavioral limits and consequences have also yielded less poor results (Mayer, 1995). Out of dissatisfaction with many traditional approaches, concerns over the increasing numbers of at-risk students, and requests from parents and educators throughout the United States, the *Love and Logic* theory and set of discipline techniques was developed (see Cline & Fay, 1990; Cline & Fay, 1992; Fay & Funk, 1995; Fay & Cline, 1997). At the theoretical core of this approach is the idea that success for children of all ages rests on a balance of unconditional compassion, firm behavioral limits, and logical consequences.

The primary goal of the Love and Logic program is to give parents, educators, and others working with children practical strategies for reducing behavior problems, increasing motivation, and building assets which contribute to life-long responsibility and resiliency. Benson, Galbraith and Espeland (1995) in their study of 270,000 students grades six through twelve, observed a number of resiliency factors, or "developmental assets" which help children avoid academic failure, emotional problems, criminal behavior, substance abuse, and other negative outcomes. Similar findings have been obtained by others studying the phenomenon of resilience in children (see Garmezy, 1985; Luthar & Zigler, 1991; Masten & Coatsworth, 1998; Werner & Smith, 1992). The Love and Logic theory and set of techniques give specific and practical tools for building the following assets:

Developmental Assets Addressed by the Love and Logic Program

1. Highly supportive and loving families and schools.
2. Parents who establish open communication with their children.
3. Positive parent-teacher relationships and parent involvement.
4. Positive school climate.
5. Appropriate standards for behavior at home and school (i.e., limits).
6. Positive school and parental discipline.
7. Positive relationships between children and adults other than parents.
8. High achievement motivation and aspirations.
9. Learning to use empathy with others.
10. Decision-making skills.
11. Self-esteem.
12. Hope, or a positive view, of the world and the future.

Theoretical and Empirical Roots of the Love and Logic Program

The theoretical and empirical roots of Love and Logic stem from two areas: (1) studies examining basic principles of learning and conditioning, including cognitive or social learning theories (e.g., Bandura, 1977; Pavlov, 1927; Rescorla, 1988; Thorndike, 1905; Skinner, 1953; Watson & Reyner, 1920) and (2) research examining human emotional needs and their relationship to motivation (e.g., Glasser, 1969; Maslow, 1954; Ng, 1980; and Rogers, 1961)

Supporting Theory and Research

The *Becoming a Love & Logic Parent* program is guided by five basic principles, each firmly grounded in research:

1. Preserve and enhance the child's self-concept.
2. Teach children how to own and solve the problems they create.
3. Share the control and decision-making.
4. Combine consequences with high levels of empathy and warmth.
5. Build the adult-child relationship.

A key component of the program involves giving parents and educators a firm rationale for each of the above principles, as well as practical tools for following them.

Preserve and enhance the child's self-concept.

The *Love and Logic* program teaches that each and every intervention or technique must be designed in a way to preserve or enhance the child's self-concept. Research has clearly shown that one's view of self has significant motivational influences on behavior and cognition (Harter, 1986). Further, Bandura (1977) proposed that self-efficacy beliefs stem directly from one's cognitive appraisal of task difficulty, one's abilities, and whether effort or struggle will yield success. The *Love and Logic* program focuses heavily on engineering situations that encourage children to struggle with solvable problems, receive guidance from adults, achieve success, and attribute their success to effort. Weiner (1979) observed that these types of internal attributions to effort or struggle are key to developing high levels of achievement motivation.

Teach children how to own and solve the problems they create.

A key concept guiding the *Love and Logic* program is the idea that children develop problem-solving skills only when two conditions exist: (1) they are required by the adults around them to think about and solve the problems they create; and (2) these adults teach problem-solving skills through modeling and instruction. Regarding this first condition, Kerr and Bowen (1988) argued that one of the most important tasks for individuals and systems is to develop clear boundaries regarding problem-ownership. When parents or educators own problems that should be solved by children, and when children take on adult problems, the health of the family or school system suffers. Everyone is involved in everybody else's problems, and nobody has the energy to deal with their own. In contrast, when adults solve their own problems, and guide children to do the same, the system functions smoother (Kerr & Bowen, 1988; Foster, Prinz & O'Leary, 1983) and those within it have more opportunities to develop self-efficacy (Bandura, 1977).

Regarding the second condition above, when parents and educators model solving their own problems, and guide children to do the same, children begin to learn these crucial skills. Spivak and Sure (1974) in their pioneering research on social problem-solving, have noted that modeling and direct instruction are key strategies for teaching problem-solving skills. Similar propositions have been made by Bandura, 1976; Bandura & Jeffery, 1973; Cormier & Cormier (1991). The *Love and Logic* program gives parents and teachers specific guidelines for using modeling, direct instruction and feedback to teach the following problem-solving process:

1. Identify and define the problem.
2. Brainstorm solutions.
3. Evaluate each solution.
4. Implement the solution chosen.

For research supporting this problem-solving model, see D'Zurilla (1986), as well as Cormier & Cormier (1991).

Share the control and decision-making.

The *Love and Logic* program emphasizes healthy control as a basic human emotional need, and it provides specific parent and educator strategies for enhancing children's perceptions of control. Supporting this approach is research showing that shared control enhances general levels of cooperation (Brehm & Brehm, 1981; Glasser, 1969), people's ability to cope with stressful situations (Glass, McKnight, & Valdinardo, 1993; Glass, Singer, Leonard, Krantz, Cohen, & Cummings, 1973; Rodin, 1976), academic motivation (Aronson, Blaney, Stephan, Sikes, & Snapp, 1978; Sapona, Bauer, & Philips, 1989; Slavin, 1985) and physical health (Langer & Rodin, 1976; Schulz, 1976).

Combine consequences with high levels of empathy and warmth.

The *Love and Logic* program is based on a unique combination of research conducted by behavioral psychologists, as well as studies examining the essential components of helping relationships. From the early work of Thorndike (1905) and Skinner (1953), educators posited a very simple relationship between behavior and its consequences. Behaviors yielding positive consequences tend to increase in frequency, whereas those producing negative consequences tend to diminish. From this basic "Law of Effect," a variety of programs applying behavioral principles to school discipline were developed. Anecdotal feedback from educators across the country, as well as outcome research, has shown that a focus on behavioral principles and consequences alone has the following limitations:

1. Fails to prevent behavior problems.
2. Fails to teach appropriate replacement behaviors.
3. Contributes to student withdrawal, avoidance, or retaliatory aggression.

Researchers examining the behavior change process have repeatedly observed that the rigid application of behavioral principles to human relationships is insufficient for long-term positive change. In contrast, when such principles are combined with high levels of trust, empathy, and warmth, students are more likely to be cooperative and to copy pro-social behavior modeled by adults (Egan, 1990; French & Raven, 1959; Ng, 1980; Rogers, 1958; Strong, 1968). The *Love and Logic* program places strong emphasis on teaching parents, educators, and other adults how to model healthy behavior, provide logical consequences, and do both in a very warm, empathic way.

Build the adult-child relationship.

Pivotal components of the *9 Essential Skills for the Love and Logic Classroom* teacher training program are strategies designed to enhance teacher-student relationships and create a positive school climate for all students. Research has clearly demonstrated that at-risk students who lack positive relationships with their teachers and other adults at school display more disruptive behavior, are more likely to disengage from academic activities and are likely to drop-out before they graduate (Eccles, Midgley, Wigfield Buchanan, Reuman, Flanagan, & Mac Iver, 1993; Finn, 1989). Other research has shown

significant improvements in behavior, academic achievement, and on-time attendance when students experience caring relationships with their teachers and when the overall school climate feels supportive (Baker, Terry, Bridger, & Winsor, 1997; Finn, 1989; Kramer-Schlosser, 1992; Swartz, Merten, & Bursik, 1987).

Although limited empirical research has been conducted on the Love and Logic parent and educator training programs, the limited data available at this time appear promising. One study, conducted at the Livingston Family Center in Michigan, examined the effects of *The Becoming a Love and Logic Parent* program with parents going through divorce court, as well as parents with children involved in the Juvenile Justice system (Hayek, 2000). Results revealed significant reductions in the use of illegal substances, in parent-child conflict, and general negative child behavior. Similar results were obtained by La Rosa et al. (2001).

Applying Love and Logic in an elementary school, Weir (1997) observed high levels of teacher “buy-in” and use of the program in this school. After implementing this program: (a) 87% of teachers reported having more effective tools for managing student behavior; (b) 84% reported improved relationships with their students; (c) 68% reported decreased time spent managing behavior disruptions; (d) 71% reported increased time spent teaching curriculum; and (e) 82% reported having more control over discipline. Weir also observed a 48% decrease in the number of main office referrals for discipline during the first year this school applied the *Love and Logic* program.

Using single-subject methodology, Mckenna (1997) examined the effects of one Love and Logic technique on a nine-year-old female student’s academic motivation, personal hygiene, classroom behavior, general demeanor, and self-concept. Outcome measures included teacher ratings, teacher anecdotal observations, and student’s performance on the Pierrs-Harris Self-Concept Scale. For a period of nine weeks, two teachers applied the “One-Sentence Intervention,” an approach to enhancing student-teacher relationships by systematically noticing and encouraging unique student strengths and interests. Teacher ratings and anecdotal observations revealed: (a) improved personal hygiene; (b) an elevated frequency of positive peer and adult interactions; and (c) increased rates of homework completion. Pre and post test scores on the Pierrs-Harris Self-Concept scale revealed a statistically significant 16-point improvement over the course of intervention.

The current investigation was undertaken to gather pre and post test data from a significantly larger sample of parents than studied in these earlier evaluations.

Method

Subjects were from nine hundred, sixty-three (963) to one thousand, nineteen (1,019) parents in several states, representing a wide range of socio-economic and ethnic groups.

Each subject participated in the *Becoming a Love and Logic Parent* course. Each course was presented over a seven week period, with one session conducted per week. Each

session lasted approximately two hours (See appendix A for a session by session overview of the program).

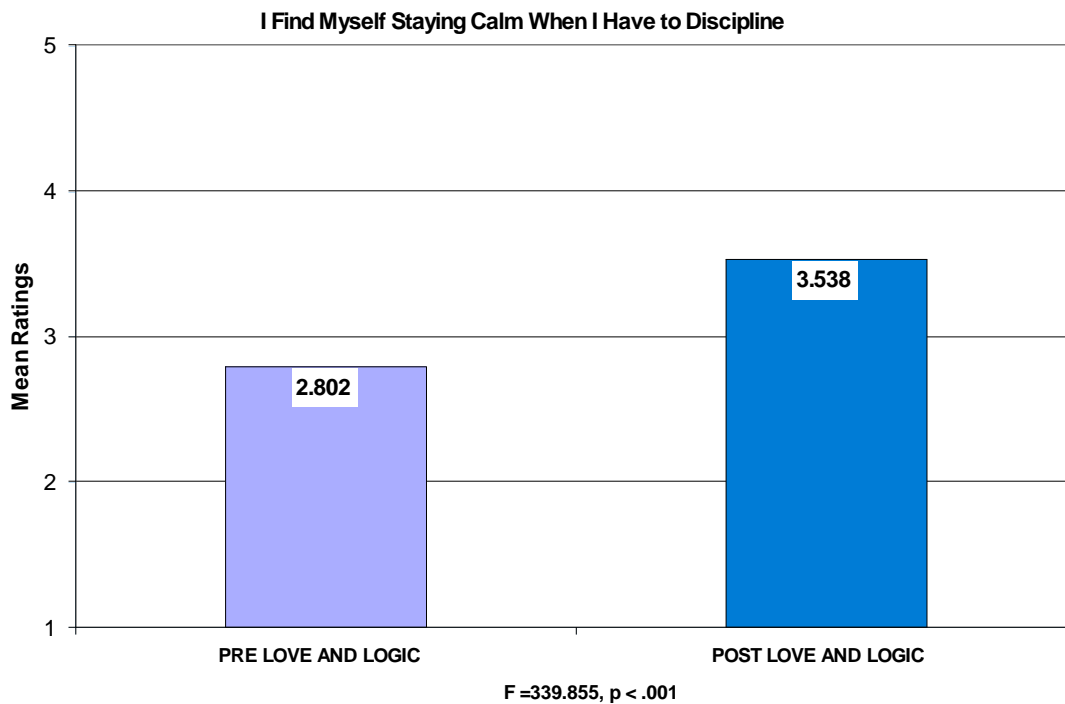
Before the first session, each participant completed the “Before Program” questionnaire (See appendix B). This questionnaire was designed to assess pretest perceptions of their parenting competence, parenting stress, and their child’s behavior. If participants had more than one child, they were instructed to complete this questionnaire considering the one child they were most concerned about.

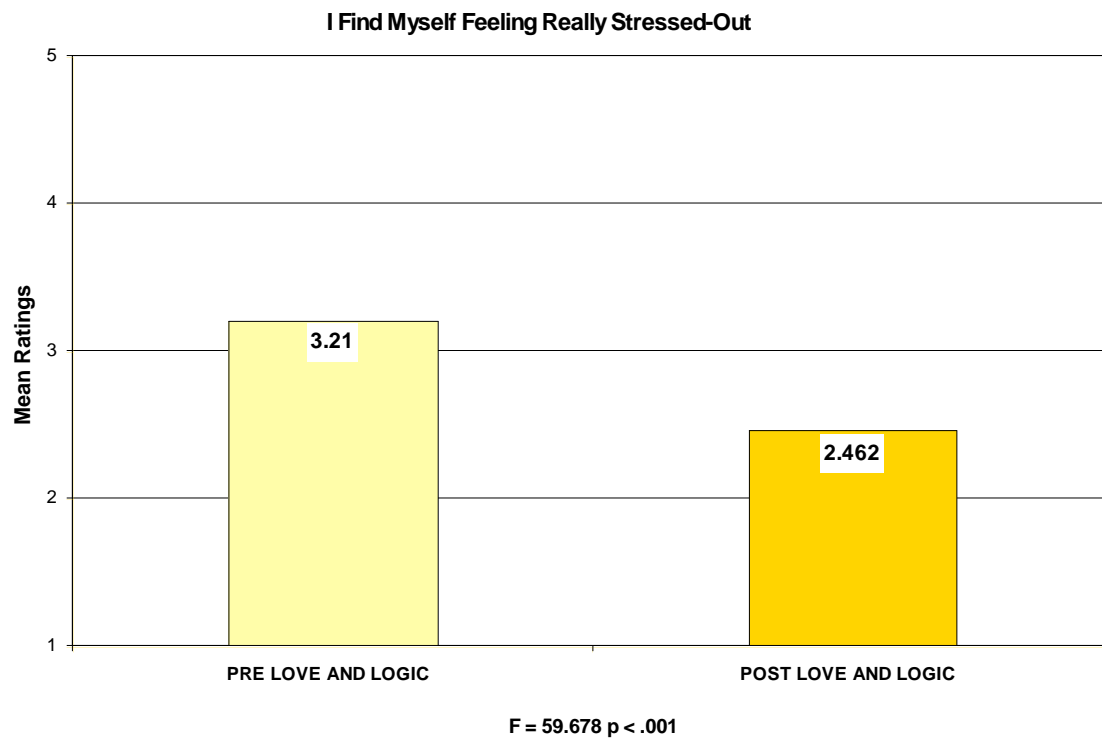
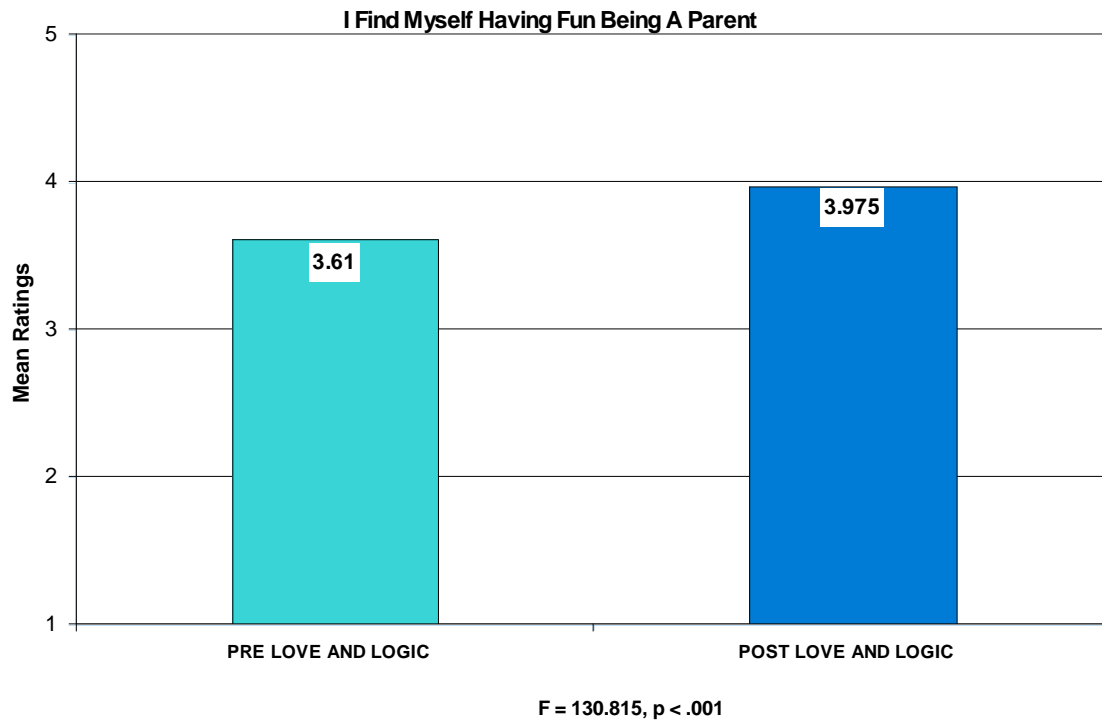
After the final course session, participants complete the “After Program” questionnaire, to assess any posttest changes in perceived parenting competence, stress, and their child’s behavior. This questionnaire was identical to the “Before Program” measure.

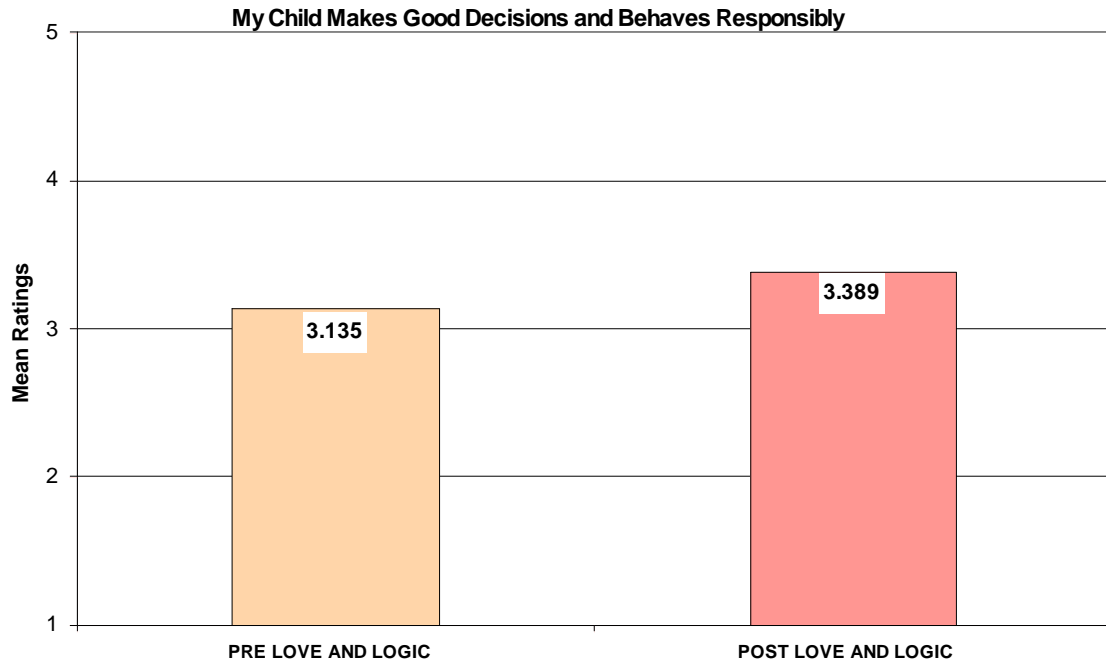
Based on nearly two decades of positive anecdotes from parents participating in this program, it was hypothesized that statistically significant improvements would be observed on each of the scales assessing parents’ perceptions of their children’s behavior, as well as their own parental competence.

Results

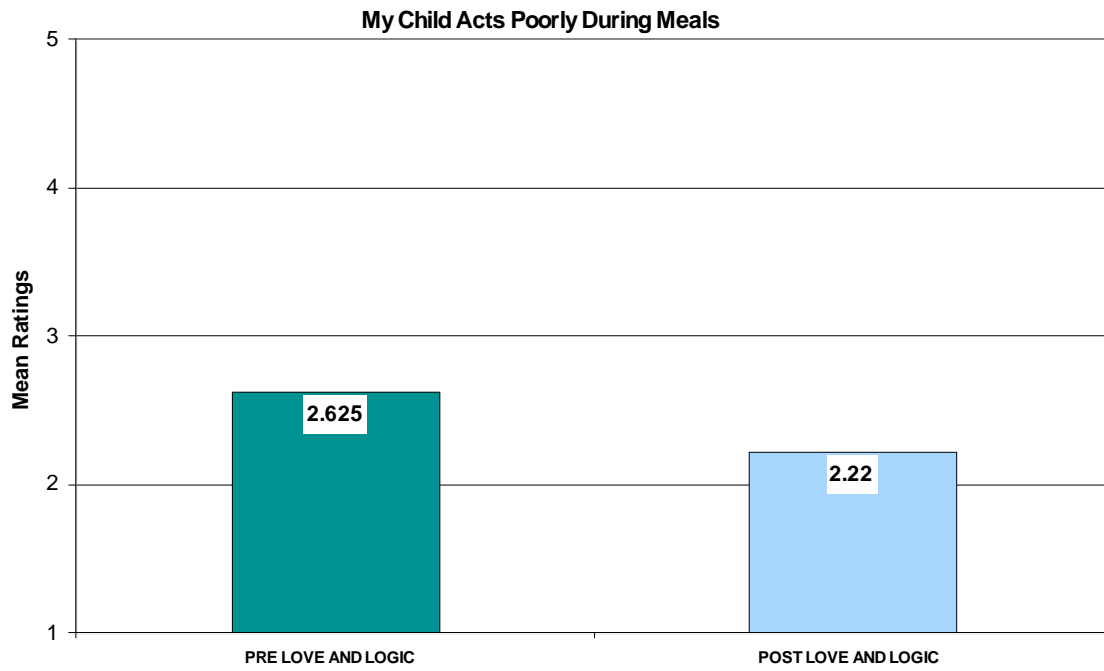
Repeated Measures Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) analyses were conducted to examine pre and post test mean differences for each of the ten scales assessed. To maintain the family-wise error rate at the .05 level, the Tukey procedure was employed. These results are summarized below:





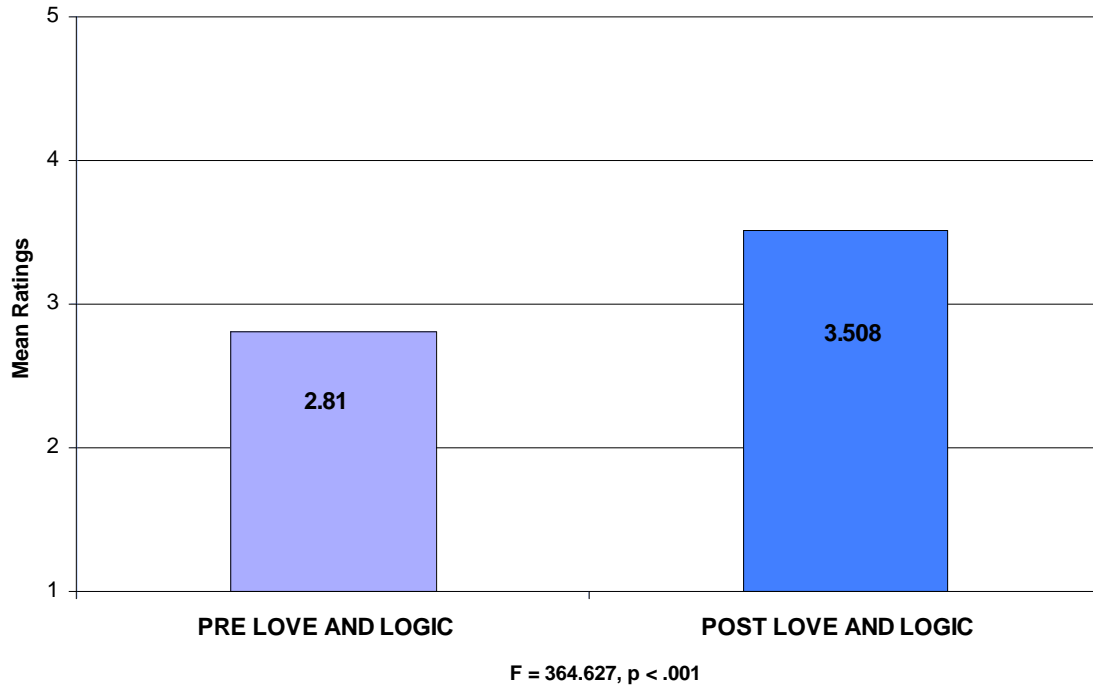


F = 59.678, p < .001

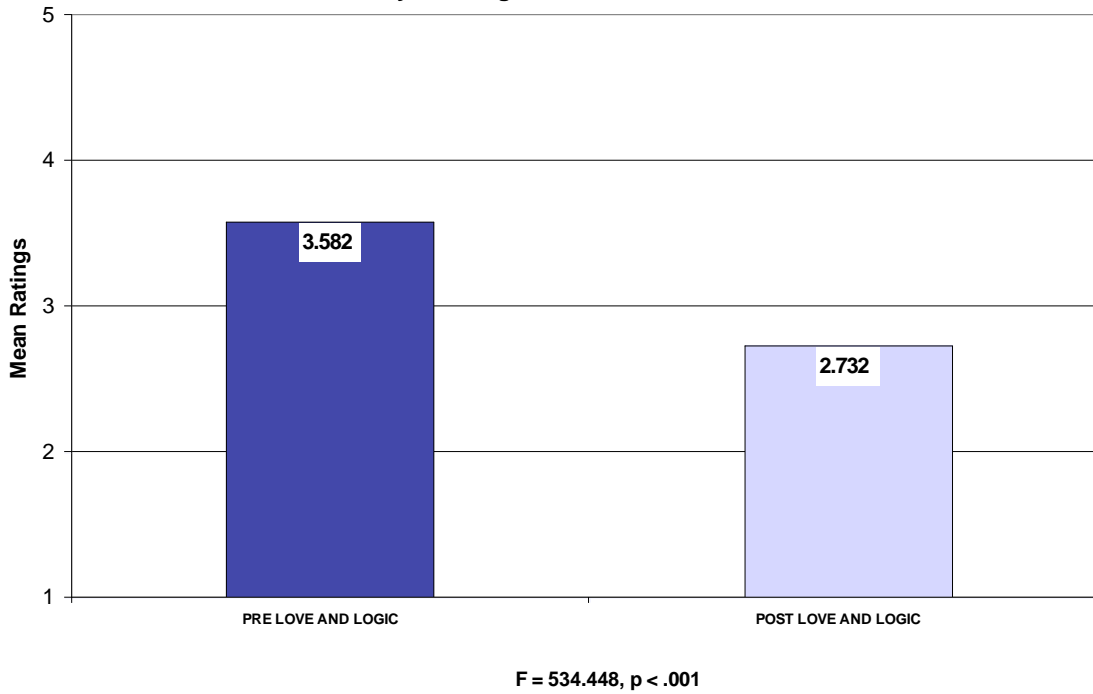


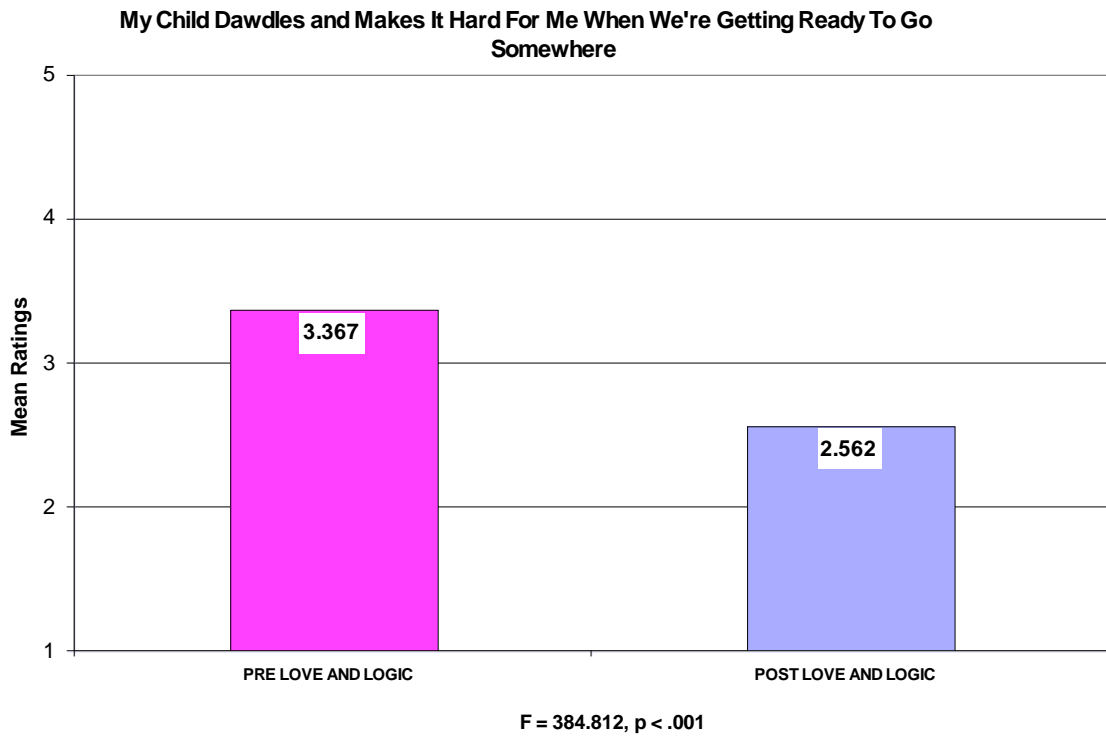
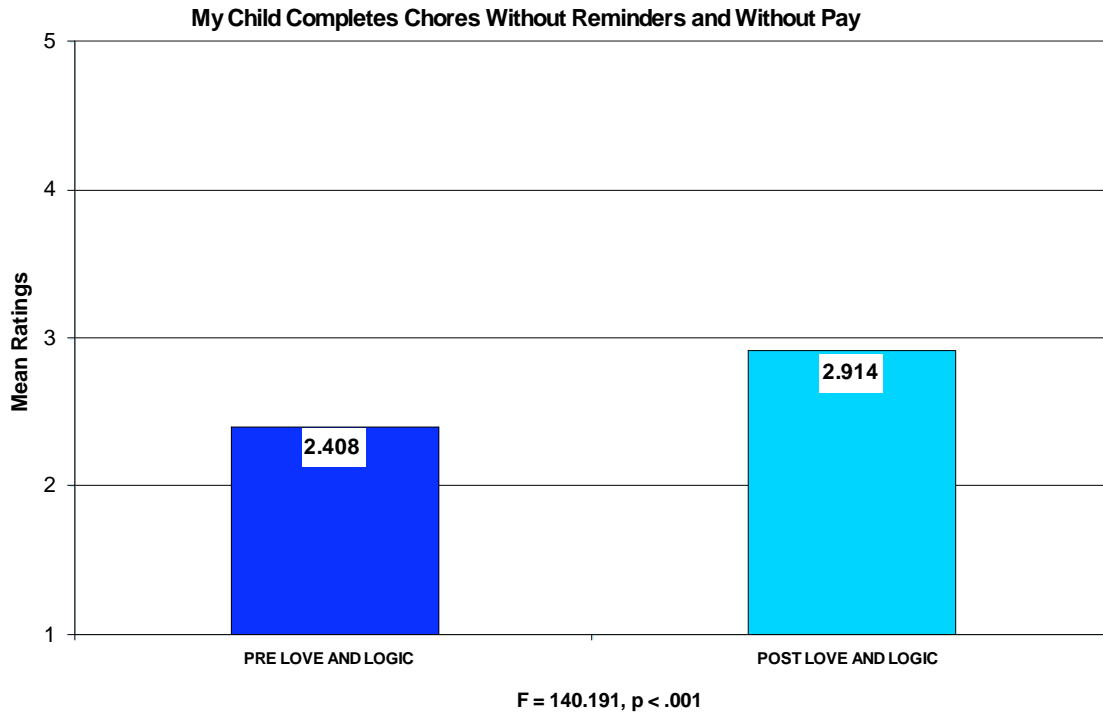
F = 132.750 p < .001

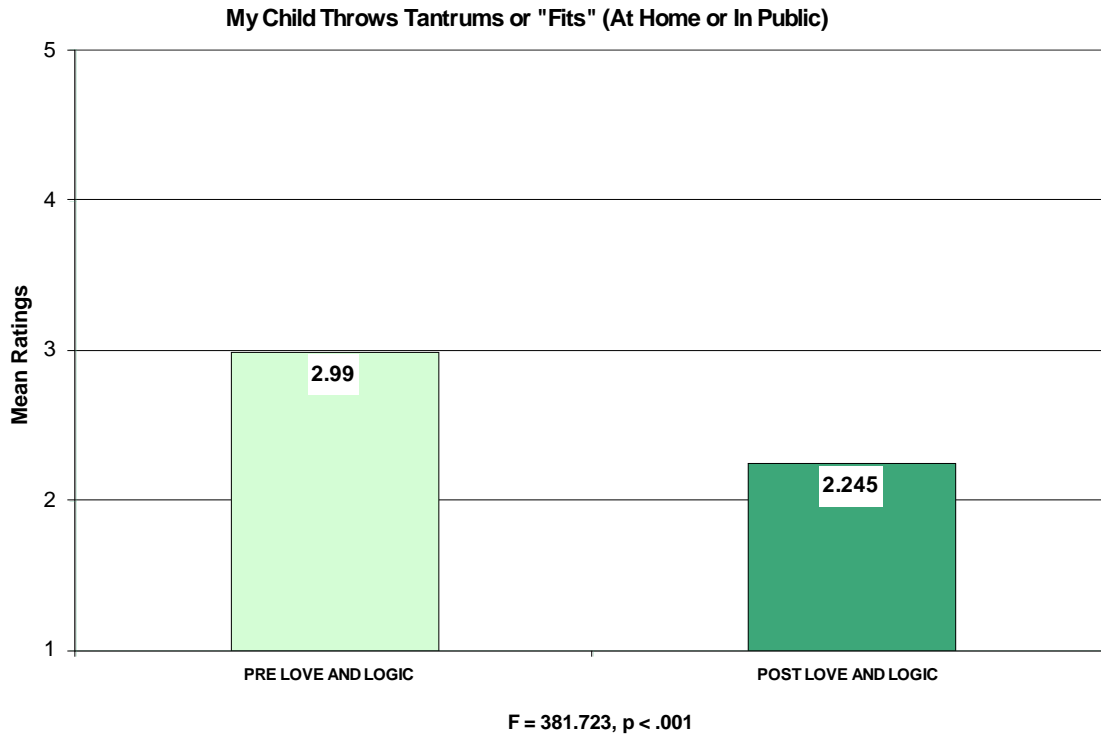
I Find Myself Letting My Kids Solve Their Own Problems



My Child Argues or Talks Back







Discussion

Perceptions of parental competence

As hypothesized, analyses revealed statistically significant improvement on all scales assessing participant perceptions of their own parenting competence. The largest improvement was observed on the scale worded, “With my child (children) I find myself staying calm when I have to discipline.” Large improvements were also observed on the scale worded, “With my child (children) I find myself feeling really stressed out.” These findings suggest that participation in this program may serve as a helpful intervention for the prevention of child maltreatment.

Perceptions of their children’s behavior

Again, a priori hypotheses were supported by statistically significant improvement on all scales assessing parents’ perceptions of their children’s behavior. The most profound improvement was observed in the area of parent-child arguments. Patterson (1976) observed that children with parents who frequently become embroiled in parent-child arguments suffer a significantly greater risk of developing severe behavior disorders than children with parents who don’t. According to his research, Patterson hypothesized that parents who lack the skills to avoid such “negative-coercive” interaction patterns become victims of negative reinforcement or avoidance conditioning. To avoid verbal battles with

their children, they begin to avoid setting and enforcing essential behavioral limits. Given this prior research and theory, the current results appear particularly important.

Parents were also asked to include their personal comments pertaining to the most important thing they learned from the class. These anecdotes supported the statistical results, indicating significantly more favorable perceptions of their children's behavior, as well as their competence as parents. Select comments to "Identify the most valuable thing you learned in this class" are included below:

- *Remembering to whisper when I feel like yelling.*
- *After applying Love and Logic more, my kids are much happier (and me too!) and seem to feel release in the encouraged thinking and responsibility.*
- *Parenting is fun...not simply something to be endured.*
- *It's so much easier to not get into power struggles and arguments now that I know the way to do it. I feel a lot more calm about discipline.*
- *This class has helped me calm down and not get so frustrated!*
- *How to control myself not my child. I react differently now and so does he. More positive interaction over conflict.*
- *Child learns best from consequences and empathy rather than lectures and anger.*
- *Empathy, empathy, empathy! Because anger is my old pattern and because empathy helps me calmly think about appropriate actions/consequences.*
- *I loved it. I plan to bring my mother to a session.*

Methodological shortcomings and directions for future research

The results of this preliminary investigation suggest that the *Becoming a Love and Logic Parent* program is a highly promising program for assisting parents in the development of attitudes and skills for improving the quality of their lives with their children, preventing child maltreatment, and developing competencies within youth that contribute to pro-social, responsible behavior.

While the current results appear promising, the preliminary nature of this investigation requires that they be interpreted with caution. Future studies are needed to address

methodological shortcomings and to expand our understanding of specific situational, child, and demographic variables contributing to the effectiveness of this program.

While sessions were implemented by independent facilitators, design planning and data analysis were conducted by the program developer. Future studies should be conducted entirely by an independent investigator.

Future studies must also gather more specific and comprehensive demographic data in order to evaluate how well the participant sample represents the general population. These data would also prove most valuable in evaluating the effectiveness of this program for varying socioeconomic and ethnic groups, as well as parents with children of varying ages.

To control threats to internal validity (e.g., testing, history, maturation, etc.), random assignment of subjects to a “waiting list” control group, or to a comparison group receiving a different parenting program, should be strongly considered.

Follow-up data are needed to determine whether positive gains are maintained over months and years.

Finally, additional research examining the effectiveness of Love and Logic for teachers and schools is needed.

In summary, preliminary results suggest that the *Becoming a Love and Logic Parent* program possess promise as an effective approach to giving parents the attitudes and skills they need to raise responsible kids in today’s very challenging societal climate. One participant summarized his thoughts as follows:

I realized that my parenting style was being a “Drill Sergeant.” Not fun for myself or the kids. The skills I learned in this class taught me that I have more power in situations than I previously thought and can approach all situations with calming empathy, compassion, and the skills I need to make parenting fun.

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Appendix A

Becoming a Love and Logic® Parent Overview of the Seven Program Modules

Module One: Raising Responsible Kids

In this session, parents learn:

- That it's essential for their children to make plenty of mistakes when the "price tags" of these mistakes are small. Why? So that they learn to make smart choices later in life, when consequences of these choices can mean either life or death.
- That rescuing kids from poor decisions create more problems than it solves
- Why delivering a strong dose of empathy BEFORE applying consequences is so important

Module Two: The Love and Logic Formula

Parents receive an introduction to four key concepts:

- Why kids fight us less when we give them plenty of appropriate choices
- That children need to own and solve the problems they create
- That allowing kids to solve their problems teaches them how to think
- That consequences teach responsibility ONLY when empathy is delivered first

Module Three: "C" Stands for Control That's Shared

Parents continue to practice their use of empathy, and they learn:

- Rules for giving appropriate choices
- How to apply choices to common problems like chores and sibling bickering
- How to describe choices to their children without making them sound like threats

Module Four: "O" is for Ownership of the Problem

Parents learn about:

- The *Helicopter*, *Drill Sergeant*, and *Consultant* parenting styles
- Why the first two styles create kids who can't think for themselves
- Five steps for helping children own and solve their problems
- How to avoid getting "hooked" into arguments with their children

Module Five: "O" is Also for Opportunity for Thinking

Parents learn to:

- To avoid power struggles by setting limits with *Enforceable Statements*
- To solve chronic behavior problems, like misbehavior in the store, by taking some time, putting together a plan, getting support from others, and following through after all of the "holes" in the plan have been plugged.

Module Six: "L" Stands for Let Consequences Do the Teaching

Parents:

- Learn the difference between punishment and logical consequences
- Practice selecting logical consequences for common types of misbehavior
- Spend more time practicing the use of empathy
- Hear how using anger, lectures, threats, or reminders destroys the value of logical consequences

Module Seven: Let's Wrap It Up and Take It Home!

Parents:

- Hear why it's so important for children to do chores
- Learn how to get their children to do chores without reminders or bribes
- Practice applying Love and Logic to a problem they are currently experiencing

For more information on this program, phone 800-338-4065 or visit www.loveandlogic.com

Appendix B

Pretest Questionnaire

*Becoming a Love and Logic Parent
Before Program Questionnaire*

Thanks for joining us! Soon you'll be hearing plenty of easy-to-learn and powerful skills for raising responsible kids and having more fun in the process.

Will you help us by completing the following questionnaire? The information you provide will NOT be shared with anyone, and your participation is completely voluntary.

If you choose to participate, we will also ask you to complete a similar questionnaire after the last class. To help us match your first and second questionnaires, please include your name in the following blank. _____

Circle how much you agree with the following statements about your child or children.

My child (or children)...

argues or talks back

1-----2-----3-----4-----5
Strongly Disagree **Strongly Agree**

completes chores without reminders and without pay

1-----2-----3-----4-----5
Strongly Disagree **Strongly Agree**

dawdles and makes it hard for me when we're getting ready to go somewhere

1-----2-----3-----4-----5
Strongly Disagree **Strongly Agree**

throws tantrums or "fits" (at home or in public)

1-----2-----3-----4-----5
Strongly Disagree Strongly Agree

makes good decisions and behaves responsibly

1-----2-----3-----4-----5
Strongly Disagree Strongly Agree

Appendix B (Continued)

acts poorly during meals

1-----2-----3-----4-----5
Strongly Disagree Strongly Agree

Circle how much you agree with the following statements about yourself as a parent.

With my child (or children) I find myself...

having fun being a parent

1-----2-----3-----4-----5
Strongly Disagree Strongly Agree

feeling really stressed-out

1-----2-----3-----4-----5
Strongly Disagree Strongly Agree

staying calm when I have to discipline

1-----2-----3-----4-----5
Strongly Disagree Strongly Agree

letting my kids solve their own problems

1-----2-----3-----4-----5
Strongly Disagree Strongly Agree

By the time you complete this program, what question or questions would you most like answered? (Include this in the space below.)

Appendix B (Continued)

Posttest Questionnaire

Becoming a Love and Logic Parent After Program Questionnaire

Thanks for participating in our class!

On the first day, you completed a questionnaire, which asked you some questions about how your kids act and how you feel as a parent. To evaluate the effectiveness of this program, we'd appreciate your help once more. Again, the information you provide will NOT be shared with anyone, and your participation is completely voluntary.

To help us match this questionnaire with your first one, please include your name in the following blank. _____

Circle how much you agree with the following statements about your child or children.

My child (or children)...

argues or talks back

1-----2-----3-----4-----5
Strongly Disagree Strongly Agree

completes chores without reminders and without pay

1-----2-----3-----4-----5
Strongly Disagree Strongly Agree

dawdles and makes it hard for me when we're getting ready to go somewhere

1-----2-----3-----4-----5
Strongly Disagree Strongly Agree

throws tantrums or "fits" (at home or in public)

1-----2-----3-----4-----5
Strongly Disagree Strongly Agree

makes good decisions and behaves responsibly

1-----2-----3-----4-----5
Strongly Disagree Strongly Agree

Appendix B (Continued)

acts poorly during meals

1-----2-----3-----4-----5
Strongly Disagree Strongly Agree

Circle how much you agree with the following statements about yourself as a parent.

With my child (or children) I find myself...

having fun being a parent

1-----2-----3-----4-----5
Strongly Disagree Strongly Agree

feeling really stressed-out

1-----2-----3-----4-----5
Strongly Disagree Strongly Agree

staying calm when I have to discipline

1-----2-----3-----4-----5
Strongly Disagree Strongly Agree

letting my kids solve their own problems

1-----2-----3-----4-----5
Strongly Disagree Strongly Agree

Identify the most valuable thing you learned in this class, and explain why you feel this way.

(Optional question)

Describe a parenting situation you handled successfully with Love and Logic.