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**Identifying Knowledge, Self-efficacy, and Response Efficacy of Alternative Discipline  
Strategies among Low-income Black, Latino, and White Parents**

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## **Identifying Knowledge, Self-efficacy, and Response Efficacy of Alternative Discipline Strategies among Low-income Black, Latino, and White Parents**

### **Abstract**

Corporal punishment leads to detrimental mental and physical consequences for a child. One way to prevent corporal punishment is to encourage parents to apply alternative discipline strategies that do not involve violence. Based on the knowledge - behavior gap framework in public health education, this study analyzed the focus group data of 75 low-income Black, Latino, and White parents to uncover commonalities and differences in their knowledge, self-efficacy, and response efficacy of alternative discipline strategies. Findings revealed that parents knew several alternative discipline strategies and had confidence in their ability to conduct these strategies. However, parents reported that some strategies were hard to implement because they lacked the relevant resources. Moreover, parents did not perceive that alternative discipline strategies were effective without using some forms of corporal punishment (CP). Knowledge, self-efficacy, and response efficacy of alternative discipline strategies are risk factors for child physical abuse and addressing them will help prevent injury and health impacts on children, while providing safe, stable, nurturing relationships and environments for child development.

# **Identifying Knowledge, Self-efficacy, and Response Efficacy of Alternative Discipline Strategies among Low-income Black, Latino, and White Parents**

## **Introduction**

### **Corporal Punishment in the United States**

Spanking or other methods of hitting a child for the purpose of correcting the child's behavior is defined as corporal punishment (CP).<sup>1</sup> Decades of research have supported the association between CP and detrimental outcomes in children, including aggression, anti-social behaviors, physical and mental health problems, and negative relationships with family members.<sup>2-6</sup> Children who experienced CP are more likely to be violent with peers and in their own families.<sup>7,8</sup> Research also showed that CP can escalate to severely abusive behaviors, which has a lasting effect on a child's physical and mental development.<sup>1</sup> Thus, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) encourages approaches to reduce CP.<sup>9</sup>

Research has indicated that CP is a common parenting practice in the United States.<sup>10,11,12</sup> Parents of all races generally believe that CP is a necessary and effective disciplinary tool.<sup>13,14</sup> In a longitudinal study with a nationally represented sample, researchers found that 80 percent of mothers reported that they had spanked their children with some variation by racial/ethnic groups.<sup>3</sup> Another study found that seven out of 10 parents reported using some forms of CP.<sup>8</sup> A recent study revealed a high frequency of spanking children for Black, Latino, and White parents of less than 5 years old.<sup>10</sup> (Klevens et al., 2019). Overall, CP is accepted as a norm by all ethnicities to some degrees in the U.S.<sup>1,15</sup>

Some scholars discussed that the association between CP and child adverse outcomes depends on the frequency and levels of severity of CP use, which could be categorized as moderate CP (e.g, spanking) and harsh CP (e.g., beating children to injury).<sup>16,17</sup> However, in a

rigorous meta-analysis, researchers found that spanking alone was associated with problematic outcomes for children.<sup>2</sup> Moreover, research found that compared to individuals who were not spanked during their childhood, those who experienced childhood spanking are more likely to involve in self-harmed and anti-social behaviors.<sup>18</sup> As such, several scholars have suggested that CP research needs to move beyond the debate about its outcomes.<sup>19,20</sup>

### **Risk Factors of Corporal Punishment**

The literature shows multiple risk factors that might affect parents' positive attitudes toward the use of CP. The prevailing societal beliefs in the normativeness of parents' use of CP likely determine how members in a community view physical disciplinary practice.<sup>21,22</sup> Additionally, religious doctrines have an influential role in parents' attitudes toward CP.<sup>1,23</sup> Conservative Protestant Christians are more likely to believe in the religious teaching that approves of CP than other parents.<sup>23,24</sup> Levesque commented that "although increasingly challenged, a main rationale that permits the corporal punishment of children is the religious conviction that directs parents to use force" (p. 80).<sup>25</sup> Altogether, these factors likely shape attitudes toward CP and bolster efforts to preserve parents' legal rights to use force with children in the family.<sup>26,27</sup>

Additionally, research suggests that parents' stress is associated with family violence, which also accounts for their use of CP with children.<sup>28,29</sup> Family stress can derive from various factors, such as socio-economic conditions, experiences with violence, and difficulties in adjusting and maintain the parenting role.<sup>30,31</sup> Researchers found that parents who experienced high parenting stress tend to use CP, particularly among those who experienced CP during childhood.<sup>31</sup> Research also found that coping with racism can result in psychological stress that in turn influences family well-being.<sup>32</sup> Stress tends to compromise parenting efforts by making

parents more parent-centered and emotionally reactive.<sup>33</sup> Thus, parents' stress is a risk factor of CP use and likely a barrier to using alternative discipline strategies.

While research shows that parents of all racial groups support CP, the southern states have the highest acceptance rates of CP, and Black adults in the south have slightly higher acceptance rates than other ethnicities<sup>34,35,1 36 37 38</sup> However, scholars argued that Black parents are often portrayed as punitive and overly strict with their children.<sup>36</sup> This may lead to misperceptions and stereotypes about Black parents' child rearing practices.<sup>37,39</sup> Scholars contend that CP research should take into account the nuanced intersection of institutionalized racism, socio-economic condition, historical legacy, and cultural values.<sup>40,33,36</sup> It is, therefore, important for CP research to take into account racial/ethnic diversity in the U.S., which likely provides a better understanding of CP practice among different racial/ethnic groups and inform intervention strategies.

Previous interventions, such as the *Triple P - Positive Parenting Program* and the *Florida Winds of Change* campaign, had used booklets and public service announcements to disseminate knowledge about the negative effects of CP.<sup>41,42,43</sup> Evaluative research showed that exposure to these messages is significantly related to more knowledge of child development, less positive attitudes toward CP, and increased motivation to adopt alternative discipline strategies.<sup>42</sup> Recently, some researchers have found that intervention messages informing parents of positive parenting techniques and scientific findings of the negative outcomes of CP likely decreases positive attitudes toward spanking.<sup>44,45,46</sup> These studies, however, used quantitative methods and might not capture differences and variation that could reveal the underlying meanings and perceptions regarding alternative discipline strategies in diverse racial/ethnic groups.<sup>47,48</sup> The present study, therefore, examines low-income Black, Latino, and White parents through a

qualitative approach, with a focus on parents' knowledge and perceptions of efficacy for alternative discipline strategies.

### **Theoretical Framework**

Despite growing evidence of harmful outcomes for children, CP is still widely used and viewed by parents as an effective method to discipline children behind closed doors.<sup>10,49,38</sup> Increasingly, scholars and the CDC call for preventing all forms of violence against children. Changing attitudes and social norms supporting the use of CP is critical to prevent parents' use of CP.<sup>9,12,16,17</sup> It is also equally important to provide parents with knowledge and skills related to alternative methods to discipline children without resorting to violence.<sup>53</sup> Indeed, scholars have proposed that hitting children to correct their behavior is only one method among a myriad of options that are available to parents.<sup>54</sup> Non-physical alternative discipline strategies, such as timeout or non-punitive reinforcement, have been demonstrated to be effective in replacing violent measures to correct a child's behavior.<sup>9,20,55,56</sup> Scholars classify child discipline into nine types (Table 1).<sup>57,58</sup> However, researchers suggest that parents may not be aware of appropriate alternative strategies to replace CP.<sup>59</sup> Lacking knowledge of alternative strategies may contribute to internal attributions, in which parents focus on a child's misbehavior rather than their developmental status, increasing the risk for parents to hit children.<sup>60</sup>

Theorists posit that increasing individuals' knowledge about a health issue and their perceived efficacy for using alternative behaviors are preconditions for behavioral change.<sup>61,62</sup> The knowledge - behavior gap framework posits that to prevent an unhealthy behavior, it is necessary that the target population learns about an alternative behavior and believes in their ability to conduct the behavior.<sup>63,64</sup> Thus, individuals first need to learn about the alternative behavior and develop positive attitudes toward it. Then, they need to possess perceptions of high

self-efficacy, which refers to perceptions of their ability to exercise an alternative behavior.<sup>61,62,65</sup> Thus, people who have knowledge and high self-efficacy are more likely to adopt an alternative behavior to replace an existing unhealthy behavior. In the current study, we propose that response efficacy also influences behavioral adoption. Response efficacy refers to perceptions that the recommended action will bring about desirable outcomes.<sup>66</sup> Studies have found that both self-efficacy and response efficacy predict intentions to perform health behaviors.<sup>67,68</sup> Importantly, a theoretical framework that combined knowledge, self-efficacy, and response efficacy is consistent with the child development literature that conceptualized parenting efficacy based on three factors: parents' knowledge of appropriate responses to a child's behavior, their confidence in their ability to conduct such tasks, and their beliefs that their children will respond as expected.<sup>36,37</sup> Thus, when parents know and have high beliefs in their ability to conduct alternative discipline with satisfactory outcomes, they should be less prone to hit children.

Despite efforts to promote alternative discipline strategies,<sup>44,71,72</sup> parents' use of CP to discipline children is still prevalent due to various risk factors as reviewed above. Research suggest that young children living with low-income parents are among the most vulnerable groups.<sup>10</sup> Scholars recommend that low-income and minority racial/ethnic parents' circumstances and vulnerabilities (e.g., social determinants of health) should be understood for more effective interventions.<sup>54,73</sup> The knowledge - behavior gap framework suggests that an in-depth understanding of parents' knowledge, self-efficacy, and response efficacy can inform intervention campaigns to promote healthy parenting practices and break the cycle of violence. To inform child CP prevention campaigns, focus groups were conducted with low-income Black, Latino, and White parents in the U.S).<sup>10</sup> The current study analyzes the focus group data to explore knowledge, self-efficacy, and response efficacy of alternative discipline strategies among



these low-income Black, Latino, and White parents. Guided by the knowledge - behavior gap framework, we ask the below research questions (RQ):

*RQ1:* What do low-income Black, Latino, and White parents know about alternative discipline strategies?

*RQ2:* What are the perceptions of low-income Black, Latino, and White parents related to their self-efficacy as well as the response efficacy of alternative discipline strategies?

### **Method**

A sample of 75 low-income Black, Latino, and White parents (Black = 30; Latino = 25; White = 20) was recruited in Florida, Connecticut, Maine, New York, and North Carolina and have been previously described.<sup>10</sup> Participants were slightly more likely to be female (52%) and come from urban areas (53%). Parents were recruited from community-based centers and educational institutions that support low-income families (e.g., YMCA and Head Start Centers). Flyers were distributed to parents, which included information related to risks and benefits, selection criteria, focus group time and place, and compensation. Parents were recruited if they met the inclusion criteria, which was having at least one child under 6 years old, a total household income below \$60,000, and the highest degree of associate's degree (with two exceptions).

The CDC's Institutional Review Board approved this research protocol. The study team conducted a total of 13 focus groups in October and November 2017, ranging from 2 to 9 participants per group. Recruited participants were compensated \$50 for their participation. Focus groups were stratified by race/ethnicity, gender (male, female) and urban/rural location. To encourage participants' confidence in voicing their opinions, moderators conducting the focus groups were those who shared the same racial/ethnic background with the participants.<sup>74</sup> Prior to

each focus group, participants read the consent form detailing the research's goals, related risks and benefits, privacy protections, and their rights to quit the research at any time.

The research team developed a focus group guide that asked participants about their application of alternative disciplinary strategies with their children, their thoughts related to the pros and cons of those strategies, as well as how effective those strategies were. The guide also instructed participants to discuss social norms surrounding CP, which has been published elsewhere.<sup>10</sup> Latino parent focus groups were conducted and transcribed in Spanish and then translated into English, producing a final English transcription. All other focus groups were conducted in English. Audio recordings of the focus group discussions were transcribed verbatim. The Spanish interview transcripts were translated and back translated prior to the focus groups. Observers' notes were added to the transcripts accordingly. The first author read the transcripts multiple times and then coded the data based on a thematic analysis approach.<sup>75</sup> Data coding strategy was driven by the research questions and emerging themes were captured based on recurrence, repetition, and forcefulness of topics (i.e., participants' emphases on certain ideas during the focus groups).<sup>76</sup> The data were organized by the types of alternative discipline strategies, which included comparisons across the three racial/ethnic groups. The research team discussed and reviewed the themes and consistency of findings across groups.

## **Results**

The research questions asked about the focus group participants' knowledge and perceptions of self-efficacy and response efficacy related to alternative discipline strategies to manage children's misbehaviors. Findings revealed that parents knew several alternative discipline strategies, and they adapted these methods to their own situations. Additionally, findings showed commonalities and differences in the way Black, Latino, and White parents

perceived how and why these alternative discipline strategies worked or did not work for them and for their children. Because data showed more commonalities than differences between fathers and mothers, as well as between parents living in urban and rural areas, we discussed the findings based on parents' racial/ethnic groups. We describe various alternative discipline strategies more fully herein.

### **Take Things Away: “That is My Tool that Works”**

Removing toys and gadgets as a way to punish children was a common strategy mentioned by parents across the three racial/ethnic groups. Parents said that they would “take stuff away, including television, toys, phone, tablets, laptops, and video games.” Black fathers argued that “beating is temporary,” while taking electronic gadgets away from their children could be a long-term solution. Black mothers also considered electronic games as useful toys to “keep children calm these days.” Moreover, they discussed that because they were afraid of child protective services “coming to get you,” taking things away was “the only thing right now you can do.” Thus, this strategy not only worked for Black parents and for their children, but it was also seen by some Black mothers as the only strategy that helped them to stay away from having troubles with authorities. One Black father described how effective the strategy was for his son:

*Beating him, he is good. You punch him to the floor, and he jumps up like: “I’m good.” He doesn’t feel it. You get immune to that after a while. For me, I feel like taking things he likes away hurts him more than me beating him.*

Similarly, White parents said that losing privileges was a big loss for their children. They reported that this strategy worked for both older and younger children. One White father said toddlers had their toys and iPads, “so they could lose privileges just as well as the older children can.” Latino parents reported this strategy worked well when they took away their children’s

favorite things. One Latino father said that because his son loved soccer, the father would just need to take away things: “If he goes on like that, no more soccer. That is my tool that works.” Another Latino father confirmed that he would take “everything they like” to discipline his children. One Latino mother suggested that this strategy should be used with patience to be effective, even though it could be emotionally challenging:

*The point is to take away from what they love the most. And if that didn't work for a day, then I'd try it for a week. I know sometimes people can't do that. I know it. It has happened to me that I wanted to run away and scream.*

Additionally, parents said that a child may have too many things to take away and it became hard to take everything away. One White father pointed out that this strategy worked better when parents learned about a child's most favorite toys. Another Latino father said that children had too many toys to be taken away: “They don't grow up with five toys, but rather 30 or 40. You've given them too much already, and you can't control them anymore.” Thus, parents generally found the strategy to be effective.

### **“Timeout is Tricky”**

Parents of all three racial/ethnic groups reported that they often used timeout to correct their children's misbehavior. To implement timeout, parents asked their children to “sit up against the wall,” “sit in the corner,” or “go to her room.” However, to properly apply timeout, parents across the focus groups argued that they had to be firm on the timing rather than giving in to their children by ending timeout early. Some parents felt that timeout can be time-consuming as they had to remain on the scene to watch their children complying. Additionally, they reported that implementing timeout with children in public places could make them feel embarrassed and frustrated because on-lookers would interfere. One Black mother said: “The

funny thing is people come up to me and they're like, 'come on, mom, stop being so mean.'" Thus, parents had first-hand knowledge of timeout and generally perceived that they could implement the strategy if they conducted timeout in private settings, remained firm, and could afford time to administer the discipline.

Except for one Black father who said that timeout worked for his child, other Black parents did not view timeout as an effective tool to discipline their children. One Black father responded that he "heard nothing positive out of timeout." Other Black parents reported that they often used timeout along with other discipline measures, including CP. White parents said that timeout did not work with children who did not take it seriously. One White father said that while his daughter saw timeout as unbearable, his son would say: "Okay, it's no big deal." Some White parents agreed that young children would not understand the meaning of timeout and thus, it was not useful. One White mother said:

*Timeout is tricky, only because when my son was younger, like three, four, it just wouldn't be effective. He just didn't learn anything from it, like sitting in the chair in the corner. It didn't really do anything.*

Parents also reported that children could be stubborn and did not comply with their timeout. In response to that, Latino parents stated that they barred their older children from hanging out with friends and spanked younger ones. Black parents said that timeout had to be preceded by communication and followed by CP. White parents reported that they threatened their children that they would call on a policeman and spank if necessary. One White mother asked: "How do you, without physical punishment, turn that situation around and let the kid know that you are running the show?"

Additionally, some parents argued that the level of punishment had to address the severity of a child's problematic behavior. For example, one White father said he found it absurd to tell a child that "I told you not to steal that car again. Time out!" Another White father echoed: "they're going to wind up in jail." Thus, parents discussed that timeout often did not work as a standalone strategy and that CP was more effective.

### **Praise: "You're Losing Money"**

Parents of all racial/ethnic groups agreed that praising children was a positive parenting strategy. Latino and White parents stated that there was not enough praise and nurturing for good behavior. They discussed that praise could help to prevent their children from misbehaving. Black parents, however, argued that praising should be used in a more reserved fashion. One Black father contended that "there is not praise in a punishment." Another Black father said that he "put more effort towards the negative than the positive." Black parents argued that a child's bad school report card needed a punishment. Good school test results, they claimed, normally did not receive praise because "kids are supposed to do that, that's what you go to school for." One Black father said that he had to "draw the line somewhere" to know when to praise his child. Another Black father said that he only praised his children when "it is needed," and "when I feel they've earned it." Excessive praising, according to these parents, could be counterproductive. One Black father said: "If you praise and praise and praise, the child is going to turn around and like: No matter what I do, I'm getting something good out of the deal."

White parents, particularly fathers, reported that they like to praise children. They commented that praising a child should promote good behaviors. They also said that is easy and "it's comforting to you." Some parents regarded other parents who did not use praise as "bad parents," because praising "just comes naturally." Latino parents felt that parents "should praise

kids when they do something good.” They also felt that praise was not hard to do. Similar to Black parents, Latino parents said that too much praise could backfire because “the child feels better, bigger, stronger than others.”

One major drawback of praising as perceived by parents across the three racial/ethnic groups was that this alternative discipline strategy potentially required material rewards, which could be expensive. Several White and Latino parents agreed that praising potentially led to “your wallet - you’re losing money.” They discussed that children’s expectations could go up every time, as one White father put it: “it’s supposed to be tiny prizes, but she went big.”

Another White father said: “Parents are on a budget, and not everybody’s gifted with a beautiful home.” White parents discussed that they worried about children asking questions after receiving a praise, such as “How come I can’t have an Xbox?” Latino parents also said that those who “reward their kids too much” would cause trouble in the long run. For example, one Latino father reported that when he praised his son about performing well at school, his son began expecting rewards: “Am I going to get a new game? Are you just going to buy me something?” Other Latino parents responded that children should know “a certain standard,” and “kids should not always be rewarded for doing something good.” In sum, Black parents used this strategy sparingly because they associated it with good behaviors rather than misbehaviors. Latino and White parents viewed it as a double-edge sword because it could lead to children expecting material rewards and becoming demanding.

### **Writing and Reading as Punishment**

Several parents talked about forcing their children to write a paragraph or read a book as a punishment. White and Latino parents discussed that they told their children to read a book and wrote the summary of the book. Black parents were particularly interested in talking about how

they forced their children to write chunks of text. The tactic, according to Black parents, was that the activity made their children memorize what they should or should not do. Moreover, Black parents stated that it would make the children feel tired because “to write something you don’t want to write for a long period of time... your hand gets tired.” One Black father revealed that he learned the strategy from his parents and found it useful:

*I was also raised on writing, “I will not say no to daddy anymore.” I’ll get my son to write: “I will not say no. Write that down 10 times, right now!” “I’ve got to write that?” “Yes. Write it! You’re learning how to write in school. You know how to read - you can read my text messages and things like that. You better write that down right now. Let’s go!” He will be upset, but he’s got to write it. If it’s not neat, he’s got to write it over.*

However, some Black parents doubted that writing would work for their children because the children may just copy the text without trying to process it. Additionally, some Black mothers suspected that writing could be “labeled as corporal punishment.” Latino mothers said that if a child did not like reading, it could be a punishment. Otherwise, reading books would be counterproductive. Parents across the focus groups noted that this strategy could not be applied to situations requiring immediate parental actions to prevent “bad things” from happening. For example, when discussing about children touching the hot stove, both Black and White parents said that they would yell at the child and “pluck them,” because “after a while, they incorporate that with getting spanked like: If I touch this, I know she is going to pop me, so let me not touch it.”

### **Using Nonverbal Messages and Verbal Reasoning**

Many parents across three racial/ethnic groups mentioned that they used a stern look and then yelled to warn their children. Except for a few Black fathers who said that their look was



effective because it meant “it’s going to be me and you after this,” most parents argued that these non-verbal communication methods did not work because “it came through one ear and out the other.” Thus, they noted that unless the yelling and warning look foreshadowed an ensuing CP or “beating,” these strategies would not be effective. Parents also said that they used counting along with a stern look at their children. However, they stated that counting denoted a threat and it had to pair with CP to be effective. For example, one Black father asked: “what happened when you counted to three?”

Parents of all racial/ethnic groups reported that they attempted to reason with their children to change the children’s behavior. Several parents across the focus groups agreed that parents should talk to children “to have conversations, to be friends rather than parents.” However, they also said that when reasoning did not work, they spanked or popped their children. One White mother said: “Like after three times, you spoke to them and they still don’t listen. You know what I mean?” One Black mother commented: “If he tells you no, you need to sit down and explain why you said no to him, so that he doesn’t keep trying to tell me no. If he keeps doing it, then I’m going to have to get the pow-pow.” Therefore, using non-verbal warning signs, counting, and verbal reasoning were common strategies for these parents. However, parents were ready to use CP as a back-up strategy to make it effective.

### **Other Strategies More Often Expressed by Certain Racial/Ethnic Groups**

Other than the above common alternative discipline strategies, parents reported various strategies distinct to their own racial/ethnic groups. For example, Black fathers talked about punishing their children by forcing the children to “stand on the wall,” “do push-ups,” and “put books on [their] heads.” They viewed the activities as a form of physical and mental training. White parents liked to set up a star-rating system. They explained that every time their children

did something positive or helpful, the children would receive a star on a sticker chart. At the end of the week, a child who received enough stars would be rewarded with some gifts. White parents agreed that this strategy worked with their young children.

White mothers suggested that parents could overdramatize a dangerous situation to influence children's feelings and correct their misbehavior. For example, one White mother told about how she used this strategy to prevent her daughter touching the hot stove: "I pretended that I got burned or got hurt and reacted upset and hurt. She could see how it affected me and she moved away didn't want any part of that after she saw somebody else." However, another White mother said that after several failed attempts to warn her daughter, she would let the child get very close to the hot stove to feel the burn. Then, she would spank and explain to the child the consequences of touching the stove.

Unlike Black and White parents, Latino parents had to confront issues related to the changing parenting practice across cultures. For example, they reported that their children responded to punishment by saying that they would call the police. One mother explained how her son learned about reporting her to the police:

*One time my older son told me that too, when he got here. Because they weren't born here, they came here, and we lived somewhere else. I remember there was a girl who was older than him, about 12 years old, a pretty smart girl, and she used to tell him, "In this country, your parents can't hit you because you can call the cops." And so, he put that in the memory bank. He was a little boy. He was about five years old.*

To Latino parents, calling the police was a challenge to their parenting authority and violated their cultural value of respect. Thus, another Latino mother reported that her son's threat infuriated her and that she was ready to beat her son.

*What I told my son when he threatened me about calling the cops... I hadn't even touched him. He went out to the backyard, and he started screaming. I told him "If you're going to call the cops, you will get it first so I can go to jail for a real reason, but you're not going to do that to me." That's how I talk to my son. He never did that again.*

Latino parents generally remarked that it was very difficult to tolerate children who disrespectfully talked back to them. Strategies identified by Latino mothers when this occurred included calling on one's mother to help and taking a walk, without children, outside the home in a hallway (presumably in high density housing like apartments or condominiums). Latino mothers also expressed that handling tough situations was made increasingly difficult because they reported that they had to do it alone, while their husbands spent most of the time outside of the home for work. Black mothers also discussed that they did not tolerate their children talking back. They reported that they would "pop" the child. They also argued that they "don't take anybody's advice" and "still do what I wanted to do."

### **Discussion**

This study investigated low-income Black, Latino, and White parents' knowledge and perceptions of alternative discipline strategies as a way to reduce child CP. Findings demonstrated that parents knew and applied various alternative discipline strategies with their children. This experiential knowledge was an important source of their perceptions of self-efficacy and response efficacy related to these strategies. Findings also showed that some alternative discipline strategies were more often described by focus group participants of certain racial/ethnic groups. Importantly, data revealed that although parents viewed these strategies as positive, they believed that most of these strategies were not effective without considering CP as

a back-up solution. This finding offered a possible explanation for why parents still endorse and use CP.

We discovered some common strategies were widely applied across three racial/ethnic groups, including timeout, taking things away, praising, reading and writing, and using non-verbal messages and verbal reasoning. While timeout and taking things away are classified as punitive, praising and verbal reasoning are non-punitive.<sup>56,77</sup> Non-punitive discipline strategies were also referred to as positive parenting, which is recommended by researchers.<sup>54</sup> We also found that parents used some other strategies that were distinct to the context of their own racial/ethnic groups. These findings were consistent with the literature that parents knew various alternative discipline strategies, both punitive and non-punitive, through their family experience and communication.<sup>57,58</sup> Findings provided support to previous research that some alternative discipline strategies were used across racial/ethnic groups while others were specific to the groups.<sup>38,78</sup> Data also showed that some strategies were mentioned more often than others. For example, withdrawal of privilege and verbal communication were frequently used across racial/ethnic groups, while changing the environment and distraction were rarely mentioned.

Findings indicated that parents across the three racial/ethnic groups believed in their ability to conduct these alternative discipline strategies. This was evidenced by their stories about how they frequently administered these strategies with their children. Nevertheless, while parents had strong beliefs in their personal ability to exercise such strategies, they noted challenges hindering their use of these strategies. For example, parents mentioned that praising was linked to external resources that were not always in their control, such as money and expensive electronic gadgets. This suggested that parents' perceptions of self-efficacy in the child discipline context might not only connect with their estimations of personal ability to take action

but also the availability of relevant resources. This finding was consistent with the literature related to the conceptualization of self-efficacy. Specifically, scholars argued that self-efficacy incorporated two dimensions, including individuals' confidence in their skills, abilities, and willpower to carry out a behavior, as well as external resources such as time and money.<sup>79,80</sup>

While data suggested that parents' knowledge and self-efficacy were generally favorable toward adopting alternative discipline strategies, there remained substantial challenges with response efficacy. We found striking similarities among Black, Latino, and White parents regarding their perceptions of whether these alternative discipline strategies would bring about effective outcomes. With the exception of taking things away, all other alternative strategies were not seen by parents as effective replacements for CP. Moreover, parents discussed CP as an integral part of these alternative discipline strategies, rather than a mutually exclusive disciplinary category. For example, parents talked about using spanking after timeout, explaining, and counting. The majority of parents across racial/ethnic groups also viewed that the effect of alternative discipline strategies depended on various factors. Specifically, they perceived that these strategies had to fit with a child's age, personality, and their socio-economic conditions. Using CP, however, was perceived by these parents as not being constrained by these conditions while often resulting in immediate compliance. Thus, findings suggested that CP was still perceived as part of these parents' disciplinary strategy package.

Data also demonstrated that Black, Latino, and White parents differed in terms of using and evaluating some alternative disciplines. In particular, while White parents used praise more often with their children, Black parents perceived that praising should be associated with good behaviors. Both Black and Latino parents reported that frequent praising would be counterproductive. These findings provided a qualitative explanation for previous quantitative

data showing that praising and rewarding were less popular among Black and Latino families than among White families.<sup>78</sup> Furthermore, while Latino parents described trying to calm down and gain composure when they encountered tough situations with their children, Black parents preferred immediate and direct behavioral responses. While this finding lent further support to the literature discussing Black parents as having higher endorsement of CP than Latino and White parents, scholars have pointed out that Black parents may use CP in a purposeful and controlled manner to instruct children how to behave and survive within a racist society.<sup>37</sup> It is possible that this distal factor at the societal level explains why previous research has found that Black parents see White parents as overly accommodating to a child's acting out.<sup>10</sup> Findings also showed that Black and Latino parents more often described being less likely to tolerate disrespectful behaviors and tended to apply punitive alternative strategies along with CP to maintain respect and family values. Thus, these cultural factors might play a role in influencing these parents' response efficacy beyond behavioral compliance.

Researchers have theorized that behavioral change is motivated by individuals' knowledge, self-efficacy, and response efficacy.<sup>62,81</sup> However, they also cautioned that the influence of these factors may vary depending on behavioral and cultural context.<sup>80</sup> In the context of child discipline, findings of the current study suggested that a combination of knowledge and self-efficacy without response efficacy might not be sufficient to spur behavioral change. Additionally, considering that response efficacy and attitudes are closely related, response efficacy might influence attitudes.<sup>82</sup> That is, low response efficacy for alternative discipline strategies might contribute to the formation of favorable attitudes toward CP. Future research is necessary to examine this association. Another important theoretical implication was that parents' prior experience with alternative discipline strategies likely informed their

perceptions of efficacy. According to the reasoned action approach, prior behavior is a background variable that influences individuals' beliefs underlying knowledge, attitudes, social norms, and efficacy, which subsequently lead to behavioral intentions.<sup>81,83</sup> The social cognitive theory also posits that performance accomplishment (i.e., prior success with a health behavior) is the most dependable source of efficacy.<sup>84</sup> Thus, future research examining CP might need to incorporate prior behavior, self-efficacy, and response efficacy of alternative discipline strategies in addition to attitudes and normative perceptions of CP.

CP prevention campaigns and parent training courses and resources, such as CDC's *Essentials for Parenting Toddlers and Preschoolers*, can aim to provide knowledge and shift attitudes and social norms supporting CP.<sup>45,85,86</sup> Findings of this study showed that corporal punishment prevention efforts may be more effective when also providing alternative discipline strategies. Changing perceptions of response efficacy for alternative discipline strategies, therefore, becomes a great challenge for health educators when parents have cultivated deeply ingrained attitudes toward these strategies through their personal experience. Many low-income Black, Latino, and White parents in this study still perceived that CP should be an integral part of their child discipline practice even when they talked about a variety of other non-violence strategies. Thus, campaigns looking to reduce CP will need to find ways to increase parents' response efficacy of alternative discipline strategies, along with reducing attitudes and social norms supporting CP. Such campaigns should also consider important aspects of efficacy, including social support and community resources with attention to the socio-economic conditions and racial/ethnic background of the target population.

Our study has several limitations. First, data collected from focus groups are not generalizable and thus interpretations of results to a larger population should come with

precautions. Second, the focus groups were conducted with parents living in the eastern coast states, and therefore, the findings here need to be considered with these geographical and cultural values in mind. Lastly, we did not examine how social norms (i.e., injunctive norms and descriptive norms) may play a role in influencing parents' choice of alternative discipline strategies. Research has found that injunctive norms, or the perceptions of social approval for a behavior, predict behavior intentions.<sup>80,87</sup> Likewise, descriptive norms, or the perceptions of the prevalence of a behavior, also influence behavioral intentions.<sup>56</sup> Thus, if parents feel normative pressures to comply with social norms of using alternative discipline strategies, they might be motivated to comply and change their attitudes in the process. Future research should examine how parents perceive such norms when they consider options to discipline children.

Given that our study focused on low-income parents, the socio-economic background and daily stress of the participants should be taken into account when considering the conditions that impact parents' use of CP as well as alternative discipline strategies. Low-income parents likely struggled with multiple sources of stress including financial stress and psychological stress.<sup>89,90</sup> Further, other forms of hardships often found with low-income parents (e.g., single parent, sibling conflicts, indoctrinated religious beliefs, and perceived racism) may be significant risk factors of CP use.<sup>91,92,39,37</sup> As our findings revealed that parents talk about a lack of resources, time, and other social-economic factors that affect their CP or alternative discipline use, recognizing such factors for these parents may be considered when developing and implementing campaigns.

This study focuses on low-income Black, Latino, and White parents, which is an important contribution to the literature given that previous studies focused more on samples of middle-class White parents. Moreover, this study offered insights into understanding how and



why parents still refrained from using alternative discipline strategies and preferred using CP. From a public health perspective, results of the present study raised an important question about the role of self-efficacy and response efficacy of alternative discipline strategies in preventing CP. Ultimately, to translate knowledge of alternative discipline strategies into application, parents not only need to believe that CP is not effective, but also believe in their positive parenting ability as well as the effectiveness of the alternative discipline methods. Addressing these risk factors will help prevent injury and health impacts on children, while providing safe, stable, nurturing relationships and environments for child development.<sup>93</sup>

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Table 1

*Classification of Discipline*

Type of discipline	Description	Example
Corporal punishment	Applying physical discipline to cause pain for a child.	Spanking, slapping, kicking, pinching, etc.
Psychological aggression	Showing aggressive behaviors, deprivation of affection, and guilt induction	Yelling, blaming, etc.
Verbal communication	Using reasoning and explanations to communicate with a child about rights and wrongs.	Explaining why a child should not touch the hot stove.
Withdrawal of reward/privilege	Taking away freedom to move around and things that a child wants.	Removing a child's favorite toy, television, timeout.
Changing the environment	Distracting or separating a child from a location/object.	Bringing the child to another room to avoid the kitchen area.
Parental monitoring	Letting the child know that parents are watching over his/her behavior.	Standing and glaring at the child.
Modeling desired behavior	Parents performing a behavior to encourage the child to adopt the behavior.	Teaching a child to say hi to others by modeling it.
Ignoring	Intentionally leaving the child's behavior as it happens.	Turning away from a child's behavior.

Natural consequences	Letting the child carrying out a behavior and learning from its consequences.	Parents refraining from interfering in a child repeated attempts to touch the hot stove, expecting the burn will scare off the child in the future.
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*Note:* Table 1 is derived from Socolar, 1997 and Straus & Fauchier, 2007.