

Daria Sikorska

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Daria Sikorska
University of Social Sciences

Rewards and Punishments Applied in the Family Environment of Early Education Students

Abstract: It may be presumed that in the upbringing process the most compromising attitude is that supported by the use of both positive and negative reinforcements. In the pedagogical aspect, rewards and punishments are measures consciously applied in educational work, their aim being to trigger change in the behaviour of a young person.

Rewards and penalties applied in the upbringing process allow human behaviours to be enhanced positively or negatively. A reward informs about success: the person then does not have a reason for changing their behaviour. A punishment informs about failure, makes one revise one's actions and change one's behaviours, although it may also decrease the power to aim for achievement.

The aim of this article is to present parents' opinions on the application of rewards and punishments in the family environment of early education students.

Key words: education (upbringing), punishment, reward, family environment, early stage education.

Introduction

Upbringing should be an introduction of the child into the whole of collective life, whilst giving the child understanding of the laws governing this life, necessary abilities to be part of it, and developing in the child the attitude of care for the public well-being.

Parents are responsible for the upbringing of their child and, unfortunately, do not always realize what it takes to bring up a child well. Rewards and penalties may be helpful in such a situation.

The success of a good education or upbringing will partly depend on the ability of using them to encourage the child to learn desirable things and maintain his previous excellent behaviour with a focus on further development. In the case of penalties it will be a correction of bad behaviour with a focus on increasing motivation and effort to make misconduct happen less often, until its total elimination.

Numerous studies of family educational environment, as Ciupińska stresses [2014, p. 45], confirm the indisputability of the importance of the family for the development of an individual, as the bond formed between members of the original group and parenting attitudes shape the basic patterns of behaviour of the young generation.

The aim of the study was to investigate the opinions of parents on the use of reward and punishment in the family environment of early education students. The study used a method of diagnostic survey, technique used was a questionnaire. The questionnaire was answered by 123 parents of students in grades 1 to 3.

Positive (rewards) and negative (punishments) reinforcements in education

Rewarding, in the pedagogical aspect, is a method consciously used in educational work, which aims at triggering desired changes in the behaviour and actions of a person.

There are many examples of its definitions. Colloquially, it means a distinction, honouring somebody with something. Most frequently, rewards go to people who exceed the generally accepted expectations of achievements resulting from their roles, e.g. citizen, parent, student, minister, lawyer, teacher, etc., with their physical, intellectual, artistic, social, moral and religious activities [Pilch 2004, p. 476].

The reward is kind of a payment for the effort and engagement as well as an incentive for further actions.

According to W. Okoń [2001, p. 251], a reward is a form of individual or collective approval of somebody's behaviour. The reward will give pleasure and satisfaction to the rewarded individual, it will encourage them to repeat the same behaviours and strengthen in them such patterns of behaviour that will be acceptable in the family and social environments.

I. Jundzill [1986, p. 14] maintains that the reward should be a stimulus reinforcing positive actions. It is supposed to encourage the individual to hard work and reinforce in them such behavioural patterns that are desirable in their environment.

The above definitions describe the idea of reward as a conscious educational action which strengthens positive relations. The reward is also kind of a payment for trouble and effort. The reward motivates a person to further work and encourages to repeat similar behaviours which are desired by the rewarding agent. The reward gives the person pleasure and makes them feel appreciated.

M. Łobocki [2005, p. 209] argues that the reward has two functions. Thanks to the reward, a child knows that he or she has done their work, according to their parents' expectations. The reward also has a motivational function: it makes the child repeat a given action and improve it even more.

The application of rewards by parents needs to be well-thought over. It is through the reward that the parents pass information to their child that this kind of behaviour is right.

However, every parent must bear in mind that the child should be rewarded only when they really deserve it [Krajewska 2001, p. 64].

Warm words, a hug or a kiss give the child joy, makes them feel safe and improves their general mood. The essence of the reward is to encourage the child to put some effort in the work done and to undertake more and more difficult tasks; every success will strengthen trust in their own abilities.

There are many classifications of rewards in psychological and pedagogical literature; D. Sikora [2010, pp. 47–48] distinguishes three kinds of rewards:

- a praise, which should be well-thought over and tactful, so that it will not set the praised student against others and expose him to unpleasant conflicts,
- a material gift (symbolic), which is materialized praise,
- an honor distinction, often awarded for frequent and persistent help for younger mates [...] in the form of a badge.

According to M. Łobocki [2005, p. 209], rewards fall into the following categories:

- material rewards, e.g. toys, books, money or other, more or less expensive presents,
- non-material rewards, e.g. allowing more time for watching television, staying outdoors or relieving from a chore.

Colloquially, punishment is experiencing something unpleasant. In this meaning, the punishment combines two elements: undesirable action and the punishment as an unpleasant experience.

In literature, punishment is defined as: mental and/or physical ailment which affects anyone who infringes the fixed norms or rules that determine certain ways of acting [Pilch 2003, p. 529].

In the pedagogical aspect, both reward and punishment are means consciously used in educational work, in order to trigger a change in the student's behaviour.

According to W. Okoń [2001, p. 251] punishment is an „artificially or naturally induced unpleasant situation for the individual”. Penalties in education are used upon completion or non-completion of a specific task under certain conditions. The penalty usually has a sad character, but thanks to it, the child has a guilty conscience and knows that they behaved badly.

In the pedagogical meaning, „the concept of punishment includes a corrective sense, which allows the improvement of the individual and his preventive sense,

which creates the possibility of preventing unwanted deeds” [Pilch 2003, p. 529]. The function of punishment is primarily to eliminate undesirable behaviours that are inconsistent with the expectations of parents and community groups.

R. Kostkiewicz [2008, pp. 51–52] distinguishes the following functions of punishment:

1. The punishment is to erase the guilt and restore mental balance to the person being punished. If the child regrets his action, he feels regret and remorse because of this, the punishment will be followed by redress. All the more, if the action offended, hurt, saddened a person, who is important to the child.
2. The punishment should not arouse anger in the child, but repentance and desire to improve.
3. The punishment acts as an incentive, which lies in the fact that the child learns the consequences that follow their bad deed and tries not to commit it again.
4. The punishment serves as an orientation, i.e. where the child learns to recognize which behaviours are good and which are bad. The child, having realized that the behaviour is wrong, will try to avoid it.
5. The punishment should be the motive of conduct, not only to the perpetrator, but for all who witness the administration of punishment for bad deeds.
6. The punishment must be fair and gradable, i.e. dependent upon the extent of guilt.
7. The punishment must always be justified: why it is administered, how long it will last and what caused it.
8. The punishment should be administered directly after the deed.
9. The punishment ought not to be administered too frequently, as this would decrease its meaning.

Parents should always have in mind the welfare of the child, especially when administering the punishment. The penalty is effective when the child knows why he was punished and agrees with the administration of the punishment, otherwise the punishment can have negative effects.

Like in the case of rewarding the child, it is important that the person punishing the child be his parent or person with whom the child has a good relationship. When a child has a negative attitude towards the punishing person, e.g. a friend of the mother, the penalty may be perceived as a revenge, but when the same punishment is meted out by his father, then the penalty is educational [Karasowska 2009, p. 4].

In the literature we find many kinds of penalties applied by parents to their children.

The typology proposed by D. Sikora [2010] deserves some consideration. The penalties presented there are most often cited in the scientific literature and noticed in educational practice. The author divided punishment into two groups.

The first group are the non-pedagogical punishments which were administered as long as 2.000 BC. This is evidenced by the ancient drawings that depict Egyptian boys being punished. The other group includes the pedagogical punishments, which have supporters, including teachers. The non-pedagogical punishments administered in the family environment include: corporal punishments, intimidation, calling names, yelling, isolation [Sikora 2010, p. 51].

The above punishments are harmful and should not be used by parents. However, in practice they are very often used. The non-pedagogical punishments are often the result of ill-considered actions in the parents. They arouse anger in the child, rather than repentance and a desire to improve. The purpose of the application of these penalties is to inflict pain, suffering and humiliation in the child. The application of these penalties may have a negative impact on mental and physical health of the child. The child towards whom the parents have used the non-pedagogical punishments, may fall into depression and experience anxiety disorder [Sikora 2010, p. 53].

The pedagogical punishments are widely acknowledged among educators.

According to W. Okoń [2001, p. 161], the natural punishment is „a kind of punishment which is the inevitable consequence of the wrong behaviour of the individual”. I. Jundzill also included the following in the natural punishments: explanation, denial of pleasure, expression of sadness and disappointment and temporary suspension of a privilege previously granted [Jundzill 1986].

The pedagogical punishments used by parents do not violate the dignity of the child. Natural punishments make the child reflect on their behaviour and encourage to improve it. The selection of the natural punishments should be tailored to the age and abilities of the child. Besides, it should be noted that the punishment is proportional to the offense committed by the child.

In summary, there is no process of education without reward and punishment. Positive and negative reinforcements allow the control of person's actions, as they provide information about the results of the action being performed. Receiving the reward is a sign of success, because the person does not need to change their behaviour. The punishment, however, indicates failure. Its role is to encourage correcting the person's actions and changes in their behaviour.

Positive reinforcements used by parents in the education of children

Research on positive and negative reinforcements used in the family environment of early education students was conducted among 123 parents of students in grades 1 to 3.

Table 1. Gender of the surveyed

No.	Specification	Number	% of the total
1.	females	66	53,7
2.	males	57	46,3
3.	Total	123	100,0

Source: own study based on research conducted.

The study involved 66 women, representing 53.7% of the study population and 57 men (46.3%).

Rewarding means that the parent shows their approval to the child's conduct using gestures, words, facial expressions, or gives the child some distinction.

Rewarding plays an important role in the educational process. Deliberate, conscious and correct ways of positive reinforcements result in good educational interactions, aiming to bring about positive changes in the behaviour of the child. The use of rewards in education has a somewhat incentive function, because it encourages the child to repeat the activity and the intensity with which it is done.

The first question for the parents was about the use of rewards in education.

Table 2. The use of rewards in education by the surveyed parents

No.	Specification	mothers		fathers		Total	
		Number	% of the total	Number	% of the total	Number	% of the total
1.	Yes	64	97,0	52	91,2	116	94,3
2.	No	2	3,0	5	8,8	7	5,7
3.	Total	66	100,0	57	100,0	123	100,0

Source: own study based on research conducted.

Educational rewarding in the family environment means such parental educational activity which aims at satisfying the specific motivation for the child as a result of showing a desired form of behaviour [Sikora 2010, p. 47].

According to data from the research included in Table 2, the rewards are used in the education of 94.3% of the parents. Among the mothers, 97% apply rewarding. 91.2% of the surveyed fathers admitted rewarding their children.

Table 3. Types of rewards used by the surveyed parents*

No.	Specification	mothers		fathers		Total	
		Number	% of the total	Number	% of the total	Number	% of the total
1.	praise, expression of respect	36	54,5	38	66,7	64	52,0
2.	hugging, smile, kiss	45	68,2	20	35,1	65	52,8
3.	spending time together, e.g. taking a walk	24	36,4	26	45,6	50	40,7
4.	allowing the children to visit friends, having guests in	10	15,2	12	21,1	22	17,9
5.	longer than usual TV watching, playing video games	18	27,3	14	24,6	32	26,0
6.	present, e.g. a new toy	9	13,6	7	12,3	16	13,0
7.	money	16	24,2	14	24,6	30	24,4
8.	others	2	3,0	3	5,3	5	4,0

Source: own study based on research conducted
 * the surveyed could choose more than one answer.

In total, the most popular types of awards used by parents in the educational process (Table 3) include a smile, a kiss (52.8%), and the expression of respect, praise (52%), as well as spending time together, e.g. going for a walk (40, 7%). Parents, within the reward, also allow children to watch television longer than usual, to play computer games (26%) and to receive prize money (24.4%).

Significant differences are evident in the types of rewards given by mothers and fathers. Mothers considerably more often (68.2%) use a hug, a smile or a kiss, while among fathers, 35.1% used this form of reward. In turn, more fathers expressed rewarding in the form of respect and praise (66.7%). This form of rewarding is used by 54.5% of the mothers.

Table 4. Motives for the application of rewards by the surveyed parents in the educational process*

No.	Specification	mothers		fathers		Total	
		Number	% of the total	Number	% of the total	Number	% of the total
1.	for obedience	18	27,3	20	35,1	38	30,9
2.	for good behaviour at school	28	42,4	24	42,1	52	42,3

3.	for good grades at school	34	51,5	30	52,6	64	52,0
4.	for helping around the house	10	15,2	4	7,0	14	11,4
5.	for keeping the room tidy	3	4,5	2	3,5	5	4,0
6.	others	-	-	-	-	-	-

Source: own study based on research conducted.

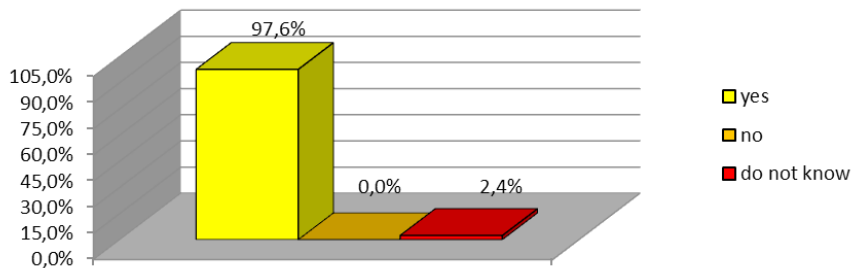
* the surveyed could choose more than one answer

The main motives for rewarding children in the educational process, in the opinions of the surveyed parents (Table 4) are: good grades at school (52%) and good behaviour at school (42.3%). Both mothers and fathers use the rewards for the same reason.

Next, children are rewarded for obedience (30.9%) (especially by fathers – 35.1%. Mother tend to reward their children for help at home (15.2%).

The surveyed parents were asked whether the rewards that they apply gave pleasure to their child.

Chart 1. Experiencing the joy by a child as a result of the application of rewards by the parents in the educational process



Source: own study based on research conducted.

Experiencing the joy of a child as a result of the use of rewards by the parents in the educational process (Chart 1) was noticed by 97.6% of respondents. The rest of the respondents do not know if their child experiences such a state after receiving the award.

Another question in the survey concerned the child's behaviour after receiving a reward (Table 5).

Table 5. Behaviour of the child after receiving a reward from their parents

No.	Specification	Mothers		fathers		Total	
		Number	% of the total	Number	% of the total	Number	% of the total
1.	the child is happy	36	54,6	28	49,1	64	52,0
2.	the child is joyful	29	43,9	27	47,4	56	45,5
3.	the child experiences dissatisfaction	-	-	-	-	-	-
4.	others	1	1,5	2	3,5	3	2,4
5.	total	66	100,0	57	100,0	123	100,0

Source: own study based on research conducted.

The reward is a positive situation, which is accompanied by a pleasant emotional state: delight, joy, a feeling of success. According to a little more than half of the parents (52%), their child is therefore happy, and 45.5% said that they were joyful.

The surveyed parents were also asked about the frequency of the use of rewards in education.

Table 6. Frequency of the use of rewards in education, in the opinions of the surveyed parents

No.	Specification	Mothers		fathers		Total	
		Number	% of the total	Number	% of the total	Number	% of the total
1.	twice a week or more	47	71,2	27	47,4	74	60,2
2.	once a week	8	12,1	10	17,5	18	14,6
3.	once a month	4	6,0	9	15,8	13	10,6
4.	few times a year	2	3,0	3	5,3	5	4,1
5.	do not remember	5	7,6	8	14,0	13	10,6
6.	Total	66	100,0	57	100,0	123	100,0

Source: own study based on research conducted.

From the research results presented in Table 6 it is clear that the surveyed parents of children in grades 1 to 3 of elementary school mainly reward their

children twice or even more times a week (60.2%), except that the mothers more often do it so frequently (71.2%).

47.4% of the fathers used rewards twice or more times a week.

In the next question, the parents had to determine whether it was appropriate to reward children use (Table 7).

Table 7. Propriety of the use of rewards in education, in the opinions of the surveyed parents

No.	Specification	Mothers		fathers		Total	
		Number	% of the total	Number	% of the total	Number	% of the total
1.	always appropriately	40	60,6	30	52,6	70	56,9
2.	sometimes appropriately	11	16,7	9	15,8	20	16,3
3.	inappropriately	2	3,0	3	5,3	5	4,1
4.	sometimes inappropriately	8	12,1	12	21,1	20	16,3
5.	do not remember	5	7,6	3	5,3	8	6,5
6.	total	66	100,0	57	100,0	123	100,0

Source: own study based on research conducted.

56.9% of the respondents said they had always rightly used rewards for the child's behaviour. Sometimes, however, it seems sometimes appropriate to 16.3%, and the same number of respondents admitted that they sometimes used the reward wrongly.

To sum up, the rewards are often used by the surveyed parents. This is probably due to the fact that the reward refers to the positive aspects of the behaviour of people and may have better educational impact than the continuous highlighting of their shortcomings, rewards should be more frequently used than punishments.

Negative Reinforcements used by parents in the education of their children

Parents punish their child so that they improved their behaviour, e.g. started to perform assigned chores, did homework more diligently, behaved well in school, went to bed at the right time, etc. They also punish in order for the child not to do bad deeds, knowing about the trouble they might get into because of the punishment.

Respondents were also asked whether they applied punishments in the process of education.

Table 8. Application of punishments by the surveyed parents in education

No.	Specification	Mothers		fathers		Total	
		Number	% of the total	Number	% of the total	Number	% of the total
1.	yes	42	63,6	50	87,7	92	74,8
2.	no	24	36,4	7	12,3	31	25,2
3.	total	66	100,0	57	100,0	123	100,0

Source: own study based on research conducted.

The data in Table 8 indicate that the penalties in the education are applied by 74.8% of the surveyed parents. However, it should be noted that mainly the fathers do so (87.7%), with 63.6% of the mothers.

Table 9. Types of punishments mostly used by the surveyed parents*

No.	Specification	Mothers		fathers		Total	
		Number	% of the total	Number	% of the total	Number	% of the total
1.	expression of dissatisfaction	57	86,4	50	87,7	107	87,0
2.	refusal of something pleasant	44	66,7	41	71,9	85	69,1
3.	repairing the damage done	18	27,3	22	38,6	40	32,5
4.	yelling	21	31,8	14	24,6	35	28,5
5.	ridicule in front of friends, brothers and sisters	2	3,0	4	7,0	6	4,9
6.	isolation	3	4,5	8	14,0	11	8,9
7.	corporal punishment, beating	-	-	2	3,5	2	1,6
8.	others	-	-	2	3,5	2	1,6

Source: own study based on research conducted

* the surveyed could choose more than one answer.

When it comes to the types of penalties (Table 9), the parents use mainly an expression of dissatisfaction with the conduct of the child (87%) and forbidding the pleasure (69.1%). Fathers oblige children to repair the damage caused (38.6%), while mothers are more likely to shout at the children (31.8%).

It is worrying that 2 fathers (3.5%) admitted using corporal punishment against children.

The method of punishment can be used in education, but with moderation, common sense and observance of certain rules. These relate to the child and the parent, as well as practical strategies for meting out punishment. In education generally, and in the case of the use of the method of punishment in particular, the welfare of the child must be considered [Krupowicz 2005, p. 69].

From the research point of view, motives for punishment in the education of the parents surveyed also seemed interesting (Table 10).

Table 10. Motives of the use of punishment by the surveyed parents in education*

No.	Specification	Mothers		fathers		Total	
		Number	% of the total	Number	% of the total	Number	% of the total
1.	for bad behaviour at home	21	31,8	16	28,1	37	30,1
2.	for bad behaviour at school	34	51,5	30	52,6	64	52,0
3.	for poor grades	36	54,5	41	71,9	77	62,6
4.	for arguments with brothers and sisters	18	27,3	31	54,4	49	39,8
5.	for inappropriate speaking to the parents	22	33,3	29	50,9	51	41,5
6.	for telling lies	30	45,5	22	38,6	52	42,3
7.	others	8	12,1	4	7,0	12	9,8

Source: own study based on research conducted.

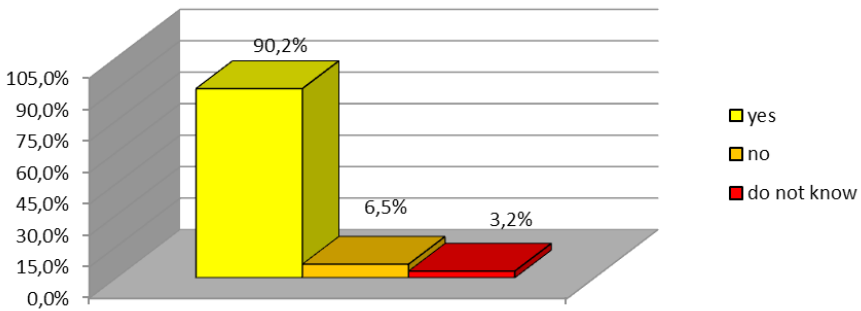
* the surveyed could choose more than one answer

The main motive for punishment of children include: bad grades in school (62.6%) and bad behaviour at school (52%). Parents punish their children for telling a lie (42.3%), rude or inappropriate talking to them (41.5%) and for quarrels with siblings (39.8%) and bad behaviour at home (30.1%).

Punishment is a sad situation from the child's point of view. The feeling of distress caused by the punishment cannot trigger in the child the state of hopeless breakdown. Punishment must be accompanied by the kindness showing a chance of improvement.

The surveyed were asked about whether their child experiences discomfort as a result of the application of penalties by the parents in the educational process.

Chart 2. Experiencing discomfort by the child as a result of the application of punishment by the parents in the educational process



Source: own study based on research conducted.

According to the findings contained in Chart 3, the vast majority of the parents (90.2%) admitted that their child experienced discomfort resulting from penalties applied to him.

Among the surveyed parents, 6.5% said that their child did not feel discomfort as a result of penalties applied by them. On the other hand, 3.2% answered that they did not know whether the child was experiencing this condition.

Another question concerned the child's feelings after the administration of punishment by the parent (Table 11).

Table 11. Feelings of the child after the administration of punishment by the parents

No.	Specification	mothers		fathers		Total	
		Number	% of the total	Number	% of the total	Number	% of the total
1.	the child is sorry	36	54,5	18	31,6	54	43,9
2.	expresses a resolution to improve	16	24,2	20	35,1	36	29,3
3.	is afraid	2	3,0	8	14,0	10	8,1
4.	is angry with the punishing person	2	3,0	4	7,0	6	4,9
5.	cries	7	10,6	5	8,8	12	9,8
6.	hides in the corner	2	3,0	1	1,7	3	2,4

7.	do not know	1	1,5	1	1,7	2	1,6
8.	Total	66	100,0	57	100,0	123	100,0

Source: own study based on research conducted.

The parents have found that in most cases the child is sorry (43.9%) and it expresses a promise of improvement (29.3%). In addition, the children respond to punishment with tears (9.8%). Parents also admitted that their children are afraid (8.1%).

Punishment should not judge a child and reduce the sense of his own value, but only indicate the error and the possibility of its repair. Sanctions affecting the integrity, dignity and ambition of the child and are particularly adverse. However, punishments close to the natural ones and resulting from enforcement of jointly agreed rules are recommended.

The child then feels more willing to participate and observe the principles to which they personally contributed. Likewise, the child more rigorously requires compliance with those rules towards others. Thus, the punishment is not like revenge, a way of letting out steam, but more like a regulator of behaviour.

The next question survey asked parents about the propriety of the application of punishments.

Table 12. Propriety of the use of punishments in education, in the opinions of the surveyed parents

No.	Specification	mothers		fathers		Total	
		Number	% of the total	Number	% of the total	Number	% of the total
1.	always appropriately	33	50,0	24	42,1	57	46,3
2.	sometimes appropriately	12	18,2	8	14,0	20	16,3
3.	inappropriately	6	9,1	9	15,8	15	12,2
4.	sometimes inappropriately	15	22,7	12	21,1	27	22,0
5.	do not remember	-	-	4	7,0	4	3,3
6.	total	66	100,0	57	100,0	123	100,0

Source: own study based on research conducted.

In the process of punishment, the propriety of the application of penalties is important (Table 12). 46.3% of the surveyed parents always apply a penalty rightly, and 16.3% sometimes rightly. 22% of the respondents admitted applying unjust punishments.

The last question concerned the frequency of application of punishments by the parents in education (Table 13).

Table 13. Frequency of application of punishments by the surveyed parents in education

No.	Specification	mothers		fathers		Total	
		Number	% of the total	Number	% of the total	Number	% of the total
1.	twice a week or more	8	12,1	12	21,1	20	16,3
2.	once a week	14	21,2	10	17,5	24	19,5
3.	once a month	22	33,3	18	31,6	40	32,5
4.	few times a year	16	24,2	10	17,5	26	21,1
5.	do not remember	6	9,1	7	12,3	13	10,6
6.	total	66	100,0	57	100,0	123	100,0

Source: own study based on research conducted.

Penalties are applied by parents less frequently than rewards. Most often parents do so once a month (32.5%), and several times a year (21.1%).

Undoubtedly, a penalty calculated on the immediate impact brings the desired effect, for psychological reasons. It is worse, however, with the consolidation of the so obtained behaviour. An individual that knows that they will meet the specific punishment for the specific deed, by no means waives its commission, but does everything to avoid detection [School 2006, p. 19; Kostkiewicz 2008].

Conclusions

Internal control mechanisms of behaviour begin to develop in early childhood. Parents often use rewards and punishments in the education process. Punishment and reward are considered activities that stimulate people to action. A positive factor is the reward and is a negative one is punishment. By the appropriate use of these factors we can influence the behaviour of people. Through positive (reward) and negative (punishment) reinforcements, the parents try to motivate and discipline their children.

Children gradually get accustomed to responsibility for the activities done and to work towards more distant goals. Therefore, it is in the family where they gain very important rudiments of further study, work or any other activity.

Research conducted among parents of students in grades 1 to 3 of elementary school showed that both rewards and penalties are willingly used educational

means. Rewarding is more likely to be used by the mothers, who mainly use a hug, a smile or a kiss while among fathers rewarding is expressed in the form of giving respect and praise. It is the fathers who primarily mete out punishments, however they do their best to apply the punishments justly and reasonably.

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