

# Parents harsher with toddlers during first lockdown

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Parents of toddlers often reacted more harshly with their child during the first corona lockdown in The Netherlands (April and May 2020), for example by shaking them or yelling at them, than a comparable group of

parents did before the lockdown. This was reported in an article by behavioral scientists at Radboud University, Erasmus MC and VU Amsterdam in *Child Maltreatment* on 17 June 2021.

The comparison shows that COVID-19 increased the chance of harsh parenting. In particular, hard-handed physical disciplining (for example, shaking a [child](#)) and verbal aggression (for example, yelling) occurred more often during the first corona [lockdown](#) in The Netherlands. This is worrying because it signifies that there is a larger risk of emotional and physical child maltreatment in a lockdown situation.

## **Child-rearing behavior**

More than 200 Dutch [parents](#) with a 3-year-old [toddler](#) reported on their child-rearing behavior in April and May 2020. This [information](#) was compared with data from a similar group of more than 1000 parents who, prior to COVID-19, had participated in the Generation R study by Erasmus MC.

The research focused on parents of toddlers because this is a difficult child-rearing period for parents when, for example, a child has tantrums or refuses to listen. With some parents, disobedient behavior can trigger a harsh reaction. This appears to happen more often in an unknown situation such as the lockdown in which parents were forced to work at home and children had to be cared for at home because schools and day-care centers had closed.

## **Shaking and yelling more frequent**

The comparison showed that parents of toddlers more often shook or yelled at their child or called them stupid than they did prior to the pandemic. There was a strong increase of 9% in the [number](#) of parents

who said that they had shaken their child once in the previous two weeks and an increase of 7% in the number of parents who said that they had shaken their child twice or even more often.

The number of parents who indicated that they had yelled at their child once in the previous two weeks rose by 15% and the number of parents who stated that they had yelled twice or more rose by 6%. This behavior falls under [child maltreatment](#) and can negatively affect a child's welfare and development.

The results of the study clearly show that the impact of measures such as closing day-care facilities and schools must be taken into consideration when policy is made. Moreover, the results also emphasize the importance of support for vulnerable families during a lockdown.

**More information:** Novika Purnama Sari et al, Higher Levels of Harsh Parenting During the COVID-19 Lockdown in the Netherlands, *Child Maltreatment* (2021). [DOI: 10.1177/10775595211024748](https://doi.org/10.1177/10775595211024748)

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