

THE FACTS ABOUT SPANKING



The goal of discipline is to teach children the skills and values they need to develop into responsible adults. According to the American Academy of Pediatrics, the 3 keys to discipline that will result in better child behavior are:

1. A learning environment characterized by positive, supportive parent–child relationships;
2. A strategy for systematic teaching and strengthening of desired behaviors (proactive); and
3. A strategy for decreasing or eliminating undesired or ineffective behaviors (reactive)¹.

According to research presented in Plain Talk About Spanking, the act of spanking actually undermines these three keys to effective discipline².

SPANKING DAMAGES PARENT-CHILD RELATIONSHIPS

Survival is the newborn infant's overriding concern. Fear of falling and of loud noises, like the need to suckle, are not learned responses. They come ready-made and fully functioning at birth. And beginning immediately after birth, the sound of the mother's voice, the warmth and gentleness of her touch, the scent of her body, the taste of her milk- these key experiences inform the infant of its world and sets the stage for all that follows. Trust is crucial and must be established early.

When trust between children and their closest caretaker is damaged by neglect, rough handling, threats, shouts and harsh treatment including spanking, the children's ability to form trusting relationships with others is also damaged and the effect may be lifelong. They tend to see the world as an extension of their home life- a dangerous environment in which the best protection against being a victim is to be a victimizer.

Parents who deliver the so-called "good smack" are not teaching their children that hot stoves and busy streets are dangerous. They are teaching them that the grownups upon whom they depend are dangerous. That's a bad lesson. The spanked child is less able to regard the parent as a source of love and security.

SPANKING DISRUPTS HEALTHY CHILD DEVELOPMENT AND LEARNING

Early childhood is a very sensitive and critical period in brain development. Stresses caused by pain and fear of spanking can derail natural, healthy brain growth, resulting in life-long and irreversible abnormalities. Instead of improving behavior and school performance, spanking slows down mental development and lowers the probability of a child doing well in school.

- School systems with the highest rates of corporal punishment (spanking) are the worst-performing.
- Students who are the most punished are the most troubled and difficult to manage.
- States that have the highest rates of school paddling also have the lowest graduation rates, the highest rates of teen pregnancy and the highest incarceration and murder rates.

THERE ARE MORE EFFECTIVE OPTIONS THAN SPANKING

Although spanking may immediately reduce or stop an undesired behavior, its effectiveness decreases the more often it is used. The only way to maintain the initial effect of spanking is to increase the intensity with which it is delivered, which can quickly escalate into abuse. Also, children may begin to engage in other unwanted behaviors, such as lying or sneaking around, in order to avoid being spanked.

Strategies like time-out or removal of privileges work better than spanking for reducing undesired behavior in children.

POSITIVE PARENTING SKILLS

Wise caretakers establish a safe environment with age-appropriate boundaries and reasonable rules, model desired behaviors, and cultivate a child's natural inclination toward imitation and cooperation. This requires some skill and patience, but it is worth the extra effort.

HERE'S HELP



For up-to-date information on healthy child development and effective discipline options, check out the Pinwheels for Prevention Family Development Guide available online at www.ounce.org/cappacket.asp.

1 "Guidance for Effective Discipline," PEDIATRICS, <http://pediatrics.aappublications.org/content/101/4/723.full.html>, (1998)

2 Jordan Riak. Plain Talk About Spanking (California: PTAVE, 1992)