

Spanking as a Discipline Tactic

Because we were spanked.

The usual argument is "My parents spanked me and I turned out OK." And maybe they did, but this is a time in which our children are exposed to more violence than we ever were. Do we want to contribute to it?

Because it seems to work.

Spanking usually does put an end to the immediate problem. But studies show that spanking correlates with higher levels of aggression in children. And that leads to the questions "Are children who misbehave more spanked more as a result? Or do children who are spanked more misbehave more as a result?"

Because we "lose it."

Sometimes we're so overwhelmed by the problem and our own angry feelings that we can't think of anything else to do. But if our children see us as their models, is this what we want to teach them about how to solve problems?

<http://life.familyeducation.com/spanking/discipline/36228.html?detoured=1>

Why Spanking Is a Bad Idea

Spanking is a mild form of corporal punishment. The American Academy of Pediatrics (as well as many, many child development experts) strongly opposes ever striking a child. Whether or not parents believe in spanking their kids seems to be somewhat based on the time and place (in the Midwest in the '50s, spanking and much stronger physical abuse was simply an acceptable part of "child rearing"). It's also related to the education level of the parent (the more educated, the less likely they are to spank). Many parents occasionally hit their kids when they are frightened (the child has done something dangerous), or from sheer stress, frustration, or fear of having no other options.

If, occasionally, you *lose* it and spank your child, you aren't going to damage him or your relationship forever. It's not an effective or positive approach to discipline, though. It's a more serious problem if you commonly spank your child, or if it's one of your dominant disciplinary methods.

It's a Good Idea!

If you've spanked your child, you may feel guilty and contrite. Don't be afraid to express your contrition to your child. Use the experience to teach your child that everybody makes mistakes, and how to handle contrition, remorse, and restitution. This present-day mistake, rather than a tale from your past, can be a powerful teaching tool.

I find it hard to justify spanking at any time. Here's why:

- It teaches your child that violence is an acceptable way to express anger and deal with conflict. This contradicts the rest of how you are trying to raise your child.
- It is painful. Deliberately instilling pain on your child is cruel (even if you believe it's "for their own good"). The slogan, "No pain, no gain" does not apply to child rearing.
- It's harmful emotionally for you. Have you ever felt wonderful after hitting a child? Spanking often leads to remorse, guilt, and doubts about the quality of your own parenting skills. Avoid the agony-resist the urge to smack. It's a very unpleasant sensation to feel like a bully.
- It's harmful emotionally for the child. Spanking is traumatic, makes a child feel as though there's something wrong with her (instead of something wrong with her behavior), creates resentment, and can lead to body image and self image problems.
- Spanking tells a child she is powerless. A powerless person will act out, leading to more problems.
- Spanking is disrespectful to the child, and it doesn't help teach respectful values or standards.
- It breaks trust and invades a child's sense of security.
- It halts effective communication.
- Where do you go from there? Once you resort to physical discipline, the only steps "up" are more, or stronger physical discipline. Don't start down that path.
- It doesn't work! In the very, very short term, you may stop the misbehavior. The backlash is not worth the very, very short term.

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Alternatives to Spanking



We need to stop spanking. We can raise healthier, better-behaved children through non-physical means of discipline. And it may take us a major step forward into a less violent world.

So, if spanking is counterproductive, what works better? Try a combination of prevention, positive reinforcement, and non-physical discipline.

Prevention

You can create a home where it's easier for a child to be well behaved and productive, and where you are less tempted to resort to spanking. Be clear that you are the parent who ultimately sets the limits and enforces the rules. But explain and negotiate, as well.

- ▶ Teach your children how to talk about their feelings, rather than act them out in misbehavior.
- ▶ Try to anticipate stressful situations and develop ways of handling them before your child's behavior gets out of control.

- ▶ Monitor your own levels of anger and be aware of what may trigger angry responses.
- ▶ Be patient. Remind yourself that young children need lots of repetition before they can understand and remember what they are supposed to do.
- ▶ Express affection regularly.
- ▶ Try to be consistent in your parenting.

Positive Reinforcement

Children learn more about good behavior from being told what they're doing well, rather than what they're doing wrong. Take time to praise and encourage your child, when she's doing a good job and behaving well.

Non-Physical Discipline

- ▶ Explanations and reasoning are always the first line of approach, but they need to be appropriate for the age of the child.
- ▶ Distraction is helpful with young children. Bad behavior may quickly end if the child can find a better alternative.
- ▶ Verbal reprimands and reminders work best when they focus on the problem behavior. Emphasize what's wrong with the action. Don't say "You're such a bad kid!"
- ▶ Time outs provide a space for breaking out of a cycle, calming down, and trying again.
- ▶ Grounding and loss of privileges should be a final recourse. If explanations and reminders aren't working in a particular situation, a child needs to experience logical consequences for misbehavior.

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