

FAMILY RESOURCE

C O N N E C T I O N

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“While spanking may relieve a parent’s frustration and stop misbehavior briefly, according to the American Academy of Pediatrics, researchers suggest that spanking may be the least effective discipline method.”



The Debate Over Spanking

Spanking is one of the most controversial discipline methods. On one side of the debate are those who believe it is all right to spank children. On the other side are those who think that children should never be spanked. Somewhere in the middle are parents who believe that spanking should only be used in particular instances.

While many adults would argue that hitting people is wrong, spanking children continues to be used as a form of discipline. This is due to the fact that many parents think spanking will teach children not to do things that are forbidden, stop them quickly when they are being irritating, and encourage them to do what they should. Some parents also believe that the nonphysical forms of discipline, such as time-out, do not work. Spanking is also a practice used more in some areas of the country than others and in some cultures more than others.

Spanking may be ineffective because it does not teach an alternative behavior. In fact, children usually feel resentful, humiliated, and helpless after being spanked. The primary lesson they learn appears to be that they should try harder not to get caught.

Spanking also sends the wrong message to children. Spanking communicates that hitting is an acceptable way to solve problems, and that it is all right for a big person to strike a smaller one. In addition, when children are spanked, they may know that they have done something wrong, but in many cases, they are too young to understand the lesson. It is a very difficult message for any adult or child to understand: “I hurt you because I don’t want you hurt.”

Alternatives to Spanking

There are many effective strategies for changing children’s undesirable behavior. To be effective, discipline that is appropriate for a child’s age should be used. Ineffective methods are often based on unrealistic expectations about what children are capable of learning. Parents may find the following age-appropriate discipline suggestions useful as alternatives to spanking.

Suggestions for Parents of Infants

Infants respond impulsively to many situations without a real understanding of their surroundings and abilities. Spanking will only cause fear and anxiety in children who do not yet understand concepts of consequences and danger.

1. When there is danger, grasp an infant’s hand instead of slapping.
2. When the infant is holding something that you do not want him to have, trade a toy instead of forcing the item from him. He will only hold on tighter if you try to take something away.
3. Baby-proof your living space so that there is nothing dangerous or breakable within reach.
4. Leave the room if you feel your temper flaring, making sure that the baby is in a safe place like a playpen.

(continued)

Mission

To open “New Horizons” of self-esteem and potential for the little people entrusted to our care, their families, and our employees by providing and continuously improving the best child development on the planet!



Suggestions for Parents of Toddlers

Disciplining toddlers requires a tremendous investment of time, energy, and patience, so it is important to find effective and appropriate techniques. For example, it will not be effective to tell toddlers not to play with items that are dangerous, such as the stove, because they do not understand the consequences. Spanking, however, will not clarify the consequences either. Instead, children may learn from spanking that "I'm a bad person," rather than "I did a bad thing." You must use discipline methods consistently, or your child will learn that you are not serious.

1. Make sure the environment is safe by removing any harmful or dangerous objects. It is natural for toddlers to want to explore their environment. Always supervise toddlers; it is unrealistic to expect a toddler to play safely without adult supervision for more than a few minutes.
2. Avoid direct clashes with toddlers, which will only make both of you angry and frustrated. Instead, try a diversion or distraction. Many problem situations can be eased with something funny or unexpected, such as tickling a mildly upset child.
3. Use your size and strength to eliminate situations. Simply lift a child out of the bath or carry a child who refuses to walk.
4. If you start to deliver a slap, divert it to your knee or a table. This sound will interrupt the behavior without hitting the child.

Suggestions for Parents of Older Children

1. When you start to feel angry with your children, clap your hands loudly. The sound will interrupt their behavior.
2. If your child refuses to listen to you, crouch down to his level, grasp his arms firmly so he cannot avoid looking at you, and then talk calmly.
3. Since spanking does not occur in calm, rational moments, it is especially important to control your anger to prevent "losing it." You can walk away, hit a pillow, call a friend, or write a note. Once you have cooled down, you will probably feel less inclined to spank.
4. If you feel you must punish your children, make sure the punishment is logically related to the incident so that they can learn the lesson you want to teach. For example, if your child rides her bike onto a road that is forbidden, take the bike away for the afternoon. This punishment teaches her that roads can be dangerous, that you are concerned for her



safety, and that you will enforce safety rules as long as they are needed. Taking away TV, dessert, or spanking will not teach bike safety.

5. Introduce the appropriate use of time-out. Time-out used as a punishment is controversial. When used to allow a few minutes for a child—and a parent—to regain control of their emotions, it can be effective in stopping a cycle of inappropriate behavior.



Suggestions for All Ages

1. Support good behavior. Hugs and praise will go a long way.
2. Try an ounce of prevention. Effective discipline means announcing clear, simple family rules (the fewer, the better) at a time when children are calm and listening.
3. Try to understand the feelings behind your child's actions. Ask older children why they are angry. When an infant cries, ask yourself: Does she want to be held? Is her diaper wet? Is she hungry?
4. Share your change of heart. If you have spanked your children in the past, but have decided that you will stop, talk to your children about your decision. This lesson can be valuable for your whole family.

Conclusion

The question of whether or not parents should spank their children is not easy to answer. However, spanking is only one of the factors that needs to be considered in the overall discipline process. In deciding how to discipline their children, parents should first ask, "What do I want to accomplish?" If the answer is "teach my children how to make good choices on their own," spanking may not be the appropriate choice.

For More Information

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