
FACT SHEET

Corporal Punishment

Prevent Child Abuse Texas opposes physical punishment of children in their homes & in the schools. Many child development & child welfare professionals believe that spanking, hitting, or slapping is not effective & is damaging to the self-respect & self-esteem of children. The PCAT encourages parents & other caregivers to explore other techniques & solutions to provide discipline for children in their care.

The practice of physically disciplining children, in the form of spanking, as a way of communicating parental anger, is a method of discipline that is widespread & has been practiced for generations.

The argument is frequently used that spanking is a quick, convenient, and sometimes effective method of discipline in the short run, however most child development experts would argue that this method is not effective in the long run, rather, it teaches unwelcome lessons such as violence as a way to solve problems or that fear is all that motivates obedience. Children must learn to take responsibility for what they do. If rules are broken then consequences must be enforced. Sometimes parents have no resource but to punish certain behaviors. How this is done can make all the difference in future behavior & in the self esteem of a child.

WHY DO PARENT USE PHYSICAL PUNISHMENT?

~Punishment - For many parents, spanking is the only form of punishment that is used. They believe physical punishment in the form of a "good spanking" lets the child know who's the boss & communicates to the child the parent does not like a particular behavior. The accompanying belief is children who aren't spanked will become spoiled. However, physical punishment, as a disciplinary method, does not facilitate learning; rather, physical punishment teaches children what not to do & fails to teach children what is expected of them. It has very little long term effect in the teaching of "good" behaviors. In addition, physical punishment is usually given when the parent is stressed or frustrated-the very conditions that can easily get out of control & lead to abuse. Sometimes parents will say that it's alright to spank children as long as the parent isn't angry. If that's the case, and the parent feels she/he has calmed down enough not to strike the child, then there are many more effective ways to teach a child how to manage & take responsibility for his/her behavior. Time-out, loss of privileges, allowing the child to experience natural non-life threatening consequences for undesirable behavior while learning alternative, appropriate actions.

~Religious Practice - An often misquoted Biblical verse is frequently used as justification for hitting children actually reads: "He that spareth his rod, hateth his son; but he who loveth him, chasteneth him betimes." The actual notion of sparing the rod & spoiling the child was suggested much later by non-biblical sources. The Hebrew translation of the actual quote from Proverbs 1:24 suggests that there are several interpretations for the word "rod" and for "chasteneth". The rod frequently is a symbol of power not of violence. Latter day shepherds had a considerable investment in their livelihood, which was their sheep. The rod was a curved staff used by shepherds to guide their sheep-not beat them. Many modern day clergy interpret Proverbs to mean that children must be cherished as a gift from God & therefore guided, not raised with violence.

~An Act of Love - According to Family Development Resources, some parents believe that hitting a child is an act of love that comes from the concern for the child's well-being. They may use phrases like "I'm doing this for your own good-because I love you" or "this will hurt me as much as it hurts you". These phrases accompanied by hitting send a mixed message to the child & may actually teach the child people who love you hurt you or the way that love is shown is by hitting. Many women who are victims of domestic violence have chosen men who "love" them the way their parent's did.

~Cultural Practice - Every culture has referred to its won traditions to justify the generational use of physical discipline. Parents in some cultures believe that because their parents hit them, a cultural tradition is being passed on & that hitting is therefore the only acceptable way to control children. Other cultures pass on a tradition of physical discipline as a method of survival in a hostile society.

~They "Deserved It" - No child deserves to be hit. If an adult hit another adult, that adult might pursue legal recourse. Hitting or spanking simply teaches the wrong message. It teaches that bigger, more powerful people can hit smaller people. That hypocrisy is never more evident than when a parent spanks a child for hitting.

