



HUFF
POST PARENTS

THE INTERNET NEWSPAPER: NEWS BLOGS VIDEO COMMUNITY

Mary L. Pulido, Ph.D.

Executive Director, The New York Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children

Spare the Rod: Save the Child

Posted: 9/18/14

When was the last time that you read an article about the benefits of corporal punishment? My guess is -- never. Resorting to corporal punishment means that the adult uses dominance, power and violence to try to control the child. And, far from teaching the child how to behave, how to right the wrong that upset the parent in the first place, it leaves the child angry, upset and in pain. Nothing is learned and so much is lost.

Corporal punishment hurts, harms and often kills children. Discipline is what The NYSPCC recommends parents use; but, it takes more work on the parent's part. So, unfortunately, some parents opt for a "good beating" instead.

Corporal punishment includes hitting children with their hands and objects, being kicked, shaken, forced to maintain uncomfortable positions (think kneeling on rice) and a wide range of degrading and pain-inducing treatment. There are several important factors to think about in these situations too. The adult is often much more powerful than the child. They can easily underestimate the force of the blow that they are inflicting. The adult is usually very angry. Parents in an angry rage often lose sight of the harm that they are inflicting. Like the cases we've seen on the news lately, the hitting can very easily escalate so that the child is badly harmed. And, if the child should happen to talk back to the parent, or not give the parent the reaction they are expecting, more hitting can follow.

The Global Initiative to End All Corporal Punishment of Children recently published a [summary](#) of research with very serious findings about the dangers of corporal punishment.

Here are a few key findings:

- Corporal punishment kills thousands of children a year, injures many more and is the direct cause of many children's impairments.
- Most violence against children that is considered "abuse" is corporal punishment.
- There is abundant evidence that it is associated with increased aggression in children. (How could it not, in essence, the adult is teaching the child that hitting -- or worse -- is how you resolve problems.) Bullying and increased aggressive fighting with other children are common side effects.
- Children learn that violence is an appropriate method of getting what you want and copy a parent's behavior.
- Corporal punishment is closely related to intimate partner violence and often coexists with it.
- It has a detrimental impact on the developing child, both their physical and mental health are impacted. Self-esteem is harmed.
- It can severely damage the relationship with the parent.

Now that I've stressed what **NOT** to do, what should a parent to do? All children misbehave at times. It's a natural part of being a child. Here's what The NYSPCC recommends:

The NYSPCC encourages the use of effective discipline techniques with children. Discipline is more effective and more nurturing when parents know how to set and enforce limits and when they encourage appropriate behaviors based on their child's age and level of development. To be effective, discipline needs to be consistent, perceived as "fair" by the child, age-appropriate, and should teach the child how to act in the future. Please note that babies are never candidates for discipline, they are too young.

As your children grow, the methods of discipline will change. For example, if a toddler is trying to play with a breakable object, the parent should take it away and exchange it for a safe object, or redirect the child's attention to a more appropriate activity. As children grow, verbal instruction and using logical consequences can be used. If a child was supposed to draw on a paper and draws on the wall, the parent can take the crayons away, give the child a "time-out" and then let the child help with the clean-up to teach accountability.

Discipline provides guidance to your child while spelling out the consequences if they do not listen. Here are the steps:

- Clearly, calmly tell or show your children what to do.
- Don't get trapped in a cycle of arguing. If your child argues with you, simply repeat your calm, firm statement.

- Express strong disapproval if needed, but be careful not to attack with words. Tell your child how you feel about their behavior and why you feel that way. Make sure they understand it's the behavior that you don't like.

*Give your children a choice, but only one that you can live with. For instance, "You may walk beside me or ride in the shopping cart, you decide. Let them know, clearly, in advance, what you want them to do.

- Take action if they don't listen. "Since you are not walking beside me, you must ride in the cart."

- Try to be consistent in your approach, use it in public and in your home.

- Realize that everyone makes mistakes. If you realize that you have mistreated your child, don't be afraid to tell them you are sorry, that their feelings are important to you. This also sets a good example for them.

Approval, praise and affection are the most powerful motivators for children.

Finally, **have an emergency support plan**. If you think you are going to "lose it" and find yourself getting angry or frustrated with your child or baby, reach out for help. Ask your spouse, partner, friend or neighbor to take care of them while you regroup. If you think you are depressed or anxious talk to your doctor about what can help. The demands of parenting can be fierce and draining, but they pass. Call the parent helpline at 1-800- CHILDREN (1-800-244-5373).

For more information about how to keep your child healthy and safe visit www.nyspcc.org.