

## PHYSICAL PUNISHMENT (SPANKING)

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The place of physical punishment in discipline is controversial. There are several good arguments for not using corporal punishment at all. We can raise children to be agreeable, responsible, productive adults without ever spanking them. All children need discipline on hundreds of occasions, but there are alternatives to spanking, such as redirecting (distracting) the child, taking away a privilege, or sending a child to her room. Spanking carries the risk of triggering the unrelated pent-up anger that many adults carry inside them. This anger could escalate the well-intentioned spanking and end in child abuse. Parents who turn to spanking as a last resort for "breaking their child's will" may find that they have underestimated their child's determination. In addition, physical punishment worsens aggressive behavior because it teaches a child to lash out when she is angry. Other forms of discipline can be more constructive, leaving a child with some sense of guilt and contributing to the formation of a conscience.

### SAFE SPANKING

We would prefer that you not use spanking to discipline your children.

If you occasionally feel the need to spank your child, follow these guidelines for safe physical punishment:

- Always use other techniques (such as time-out) first. Use spanking only for behaviors that are dangerous or deliberately defiant of your instructions.
- Hit only with an open hand. Hit through clothing. It is difficult to judge how hard you are hitting your child if you hit her with an object other than your hand. Paddles and belts may cause bruises.
- Spanking should never leave more than temporary redness of the skin.
- Hit only on the buttocks, legs, or hands. Hitting a child on the face is demeaning as well as dangerous; in fact, slapping the face is inappropriate at any age. Your child could suddenly turn her head and the slap could damage her vision or hearing.
- Give only one swat; that is enough to change behavior. Hitting your child more than once may relieve your anger but will probably not teach your child anything additional.
- Don't spank children less than 18 months of age. Spanking is absolutely inappropriate before your child has learned to walk. Spanking should be unnecessary after the age of 6 years because you can use negotiation and discussion to resolve most differences with school-age children.
- Avoid shaking children, because of the serious risk of causing blood clots on the brain (subdural hematomas).
- Don't use physical punishment more than once each day. The more your child is spanked, the less effect it will have.
- Learn alternatives to physical discipline. Isolating a child in a corner or bedroom for a time-out is much more civilized and effective. Learn how to use other forms of discipline. Spanking should never be the main form of discipline a child receives.
- Never spank your child when you are out of control, scared, or drinking. A few parents can't stop hitting their child once they start. They can't control their rage and need help for themselves, such as from Parents Anonymous groups. They must learn to walk away from their children and never use physical punishment.
- Don't use physical punishment for aggressive misbehavior, such as biting, hitting, or kicking. Physical punishment under such circumstances teaches a child that it is all right for a bigger person to strike a smaller person. Aggressive children need to be taught restraint and self-control. They respond best to time-outs, which give them an opportunity to think about the pain they have caused. If you are not using time-outs, read more on how to make them work for you.
- Don't allow babysitters, child-care staff, and teachers to spank your children.