

Disciplinary Spanking By Parents

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I. Evolution of the Debate

Disciplinary spanking has been a corrective measure used by parents in child rearing for literally thousands of years and in many different cultures. It has wide acceptance in the United States among parents,¹ but its majority support among physicians has come under pressure of late. Many psychologists today are hesitant to recommend spanking, though most supported its use in the mid-seventies and acknowledged using spanking with their own children.² Ordinary spanking and physical child abuse have been understood to be distinctly different, but over the past two decades this distinction between the two has been blurred by those opposed to spanking. After all these years of acceptance have new surprising discoveries been made that would justify abolishing this age-old practice? A close look at the facts and the fiction is necessary to determine the answer.

II. Definitions

Corporal punishment is defined as *bodily punishment of any kind*. Included under this very broad definition is the practice of ordinary spanking, as well as obviously abusive acts such as beating, kicking, punching, choking, face slapping, scalding and even starvation. In discussing spanking, a broad term like corporal punishment may be useful for propaganda purposes, but not for doing worthwhile research on parental discipline. More specific definitions must be used to separate appropriate versus inappropriate corporal punishment.

CORPORAL PUNISHMENT

	<u>Spanking</u>	<u>Physical Abuse**</u>
<i>The Act</i>	Spanking: one or two spanks to the buttocks.	Beating: to strike repeatedly. Also: kick, punch, choking, etc.
<i>The Intent</i>	Training: to correct problem behavior.	Violence: "physical force intended to injure or abuse."
<i>The Attitude</i>	Love and concern	Anger and malice
<i>The Effects</i>	Proper Behavior	Emotional and physical injury

**Physical child abuse is defined as non-accidental injury inflicted by a parent or caregiver.³

Disciplinary spanking is one of many disciplinary responses available to parents intended to shape appropriate behavior in the developing toddler and child. It is an adjunctive corrective measure to be used in combination with primary responses such as restraint, natural and logical consequences, time-out, and restriction of privileges. Spanking should be used mainly as a back-up to primary measures, and then independently to correct deliberate and persistent problem behavior that is not remedied with milder measures. It is most useful and effective with toddlers and preschoolers from 18 months to six years. Spanking should always be a planned action by a parent and not an impulsive reaction to misbehavior. The child should be forewarned of the spanking consequence for each of the designated problem behaviors. Spanking should always be administered in private. It should consist of one or two spanks to the child's buttocks followed by a calm review of the offense and the desired behavior.

III. Medical literature supporting Disciplinary Spanking.

There has been little published research examining the effects of ordinary, non-abusive spanking administered by loving, well-intentioned parents. The best examples of research demonstrating long-term and short-term effectiveness of disciplinary spanking are studies by Baumrind and Roberts, respectively.

Long Term

Baumrind Study: In a decade-long prospective study of families with children ages 4-9 years, Dr. Diana Baumrind identified three general parenting styles and evaluated the effect these styles had upon the children's development.⁴ A child's instrumental competence was defined by social responsibility, independence, achievement orientation, and vitality.

The Parenting Styles

Authoritarian Parents were more controlling, more restrictive, less inclined to explain, more punitive, detached, less warm, and expressed more anger with child disobedience.

Permissive Parents were markedly less controlling, minimally demanding, freely granting of the child's demands, uninvolved with the child, and warmer than authoritarian parents. They did not feel in control of their child's behavior. They were affirming, accepting, and benign toward the child's impulses and actions.

Authoritative Parents employed a combination of firm control and positive encouragement of a child's independence. They affirmed the child's qualities and, yet, set a standard for future conduct. They made reasonable demands of their children and promoted respect for authority. They were more consistent with the discipline.

The Disciplinary Measures Used

1. Authoritarian: used love withdrawal, fear, little encouragement, and often corporal punishment. Extremely high control-nuturance ratio.
2. Permissive: used love withdrawal, ridicule, guilt provocation, little power and reasoning, and rarely corporal punishment. Low control-nuturance ratio.
3. Authoritative: Used less love withdrawal and fear/guilt provocation than #1. Used corporal punishment more often than #2. They used reason, power, and reinforcement to achieve objectives. They employed a higher ratio of positive to negative reinforcement than #1. Balanced control-nuturance ratio.

Some of the study's findings: (pp 35 - 37)

- The Authoritative parents who balanced firm control with encouragement reared more socially responsible and assertive children, i.e. achievement orientation, friendliness toward peers, cooperativeness with adults, social dominance, nonconforming behavior and purposiveness.
- The Authoritative parents favored corporal punishment over other negative sanctions.
- Evidence from this study "did not indicate that negative reinforcement or corporal punishment per se were harmful or ineffective procedures, but rather the total patterns of parental control determined the effects on the child of these procedures."(underline added).
- Permissive parents (both mothers and fathers) admitted to "explosive attacks of rage in which they inflicted more pain or injury upon the child than they had intended." They became more "violent because they felt they could neither control the child's behavior nor tolerate its effect upon themselves."
- Nonbrutal punishment, including physical expressions, by loving parents who used correct methodology achieved superior behavior control as well as:
 - a. More rapid re-establishment of affectional relationship between parent and child following an emotional release.
 - b. Less guilt reactions to transgression since an unpleasant consequence is imposed.
- Punishment is an effective means of controlling childhood behavior, and is not intrinsically harmful to the child.

Short Term

Roberts Studies: The short term effectiveness of disciplinary spanking is best demonstrated by clinical field trials conducted by Dr. Mark Roberts at Idaho State.^{4,5,6} It was his goal to determine which back-up procedure was most effective in controlling a child's escape from time-out. A spank procedure was tested against 3 other procedures in randomized clinical field trials. Two

were found to be most effective — the spank and the barrier procedure. With the spank procedure, the escaping child was given two spanks to the buttocks and returned to time-out. With the barrier procedure, the child was taken to a small 4x5 carpeted room and barricaded inside with a sheet of plywood for a brief period of time, then returned to time-out. The two other procedures, the hold and the release, were less effective.

Though the spank and the barrier were equally effective, parents preferred the spank procedure in the home setting (64%). The barrier procedure, with its room requirement, is less practical for many homes. Forehand and McMahon in their research found "a mild spanking to be the most feasible back-up for the child leaving the time-out chair." ^{7(p.80)} As a result of these studies, some popular parenting texts, such as Christophersen's *Little People*⁸ and Clark's *S.O.S., Help for Parents*⁹, recommend the spank procedure to enforce time-out with the persistently non-compliant child.

Though these studies focused on spanking only as an enforcer of time-out, they are significant for other reasons:

1. They are well-designed, randomized, clinical field studies that compare spanking to other responses.
2. The problem behavior of noncompliance with time-out is very similar to other types of problem behaviors a defiant child might display. These studies offer proof of spanking's effectiveness in changing problem behavior.
3. The effectiveness of time-out is crucial to most behavioral parenting programs. The spank procedure can strengthen time-out's effectiveness and reducing a parent's need of spanking independently or primarily.

IV. Medical literature opposing Disciplinary Spanking.

Most of the anti-spanking literature consists of opinion-driven editorials, reviews, and commentaries. One editorial will often cite another and thus will perpetuate seemingly documented myths. Lyons, Anderson and Larson conducted a systematic review of articles published between 1984 and 1993 that addressed corporal punishment.¹⁰ They found that 83% of the 132 articles were editorials or commentaries devoid of empirical data. All but one of the few empirical studies were flawed by the inclusion of severe physical abuse with disciplinary spanking. The one remaining study specific for disciplinary spanking revealed no detrimental effects on the child.

The quality of published research denouncing disciplinary spanking is lacking and specifically suffers from one or more of the following design flaws:

1. Corporal punishment is addressed as a whole, without discriminating disciplinary spanking from obviously abusive physical punishment.
2. The practice of spanking is not limited to preschool children; rather the focus is upon spanking of adolescents, which is not a recommended practice. This is the case with one of spanking's most outspoken opponents, Dr. Murray Straus. His survey-based studies are promoted as evidence for a link between spanking during "childhood" and poor adult

outcomes, such as alcohol abuse, marital violence, depression, and suicidal thinking.¹¹ These conclusions are built entirely upon situations of "physical punishment during the teen years", not childhood, with teens experiencing up to thirty or more hitting events in a year. These correlates of teenage spanking tell us nothing about the effects of appropriate disciplinary spanking of preschoolers.

3. The research is correlational and does not show clear evidence of a causal effect of adverse outcome. Such is the situation where corporal punishment (broadly defined) is linked with aggression in children. Though the actual cause of the aggression is dysfunctional parenting, disciplinary spanking is found guilty by association, not causation.
4. The studies rely upon the parents' personal practices of spanking, rather than teaching them a proper procedure and application prior to the study. In the studies that have confirmed the effectiveness of alternative discipline responses such as time-out, parents were first trained in the proper use of the discipline response by instruction and role-playing. Properness of application should ideally be verified to generate accurate conclusions about spanking's effectiveness.
5. In the anti-spanking surveys, parents are the reporters of both their children's behavior and their own discipline practices. This is problematic since parents may be biased in their reporting of child behavior in order to justify their disciplinary actions. Likewise, surveys of adults' recall of being spanked as a child are probably biased toward recalling the harsher practices of spanking they experienced in later childhood years.
6. Other important variables which greatly influence the outcome of parenting are largely ignored, such as parental nurturance, parental use of other measures (reasoning, consequences, timeout) in conjunction with spanking, parental attitude with spanking, the exact manner of application of the spanking (as a back-up or primary), and the child's temperament. When comparing parents who are equivalent on positive parental involvement¹² or on reasoning¹³, the associations of spanking with negative child behaviors disappear.
7. The effects of spanking are usually not compared with other alternative responses to child misbehavior.
8. Much of the longitudinal research relies upon the measure of frequency of spanking without controlling for the frequency of a child's misbehavior or a child's behavioral temperament. Just as a child's contrary temperament will require more frequent corrective responses early in life, it also increases the probability of a suboptimal outcome later in life. In other words, frequent misbehavior or a difficult temperament tends to predict subsequent child behavior problems.

Corporal Punishment Conference: To gain a better understanding of the research on corporal punishment, the American Academy of Pediatrics cosponsored a symposium of experts on child development to examine the current data on the use of corporal punishment with children. The group's goal was to develop "consensus statements regarding the scientific evidence on the long and short term effects of corporal punishment on children." The proceedings of the conference were published as a supplement to the October 1996 issue of *Pediatrics*.

Definitions were among the group's first order of business:

Corporal Punishment: "bodily punishment of any kind."

Spanking: "physically non-injurious, intended to modify behavior, and administered with the open hand to the extremities or buttocks."

Using these definitions, the committee could not reach any strong conclusions favoring or opposing a parent's use of disciplinary spanking. Central to the conference, however, was an exhaustive review of the current medical and psychological literature on nonabusive corporal punishment presented by Dr. Robert Larzelere.¹⁴ In this review Larzelere found stronger evidence of beneficial than detrimental effects of disciplinary spanking by parents with preschool children, ages 2 to 6 years. Dr. Diana Baumrind began her response to that review, "As Dr. Larzelere's review of quality studies documents, a blanket injunction against disciplinary spanking by parents is not scientifically supportable." In particular, not one of the 35 best studies in the review identified a single alternative discipline response that had superior child outcomes to that of nonabusive physical punishment of children under the age of 13.

Among the findings of the conference:

- The strongest studies do not support a definitive link between spanking and later violent behavior.
- The strongest studies do not indicate spanking to be detrimental to a child.
- Spanking should not be the primary or only response used by a parent.
- Limited data suggest short-term effectiveness of spanking in a controlled setting.
- More research is needed on the use of spanking with children.

The Co-chairpersons, Drs. Stanford Friedman and Kenneth Schonberg, concluded "whether spanking is harmful or beneficial to a child must be viewed within the total context of a child's life and environment.... Given a relatively 'healthy' family life in a supportive environment, spanking in and of itself is not detrimental to a child or predictive of later problems...[T]here is a lack of research related to the use of corporal punishment."¹⁵

V. The Application: How should Spanking be used?

The *authoritative* style of parenting which balances firm control and encouragement of the child is recognized by most experts as the optimal style of child rearing. The authoritative style, as described by Dr. Baumrind, includes the use of spanking as a corrective measure. Though some have suggested it, there is no evidence that authoritative parenting can be accomplished with all types of children without the availability of spanking.

During the early stages of a child's cognitive development, a parent's disciplinary responses are very limited. For children under 5 years of age, **reason and explanation** alone are ineffective in changing problem behavior. This was reported in an August 1995 article by Dr. Nathan Blum and associates published in *Pediatrics*.¹⁶ They indicated that parents of young children should manage behaviors by use of the following: ^(p. 336)

- Appropriate Behavior.....Positive incentives and praise
- Mildly Inappropriate Behavior.....Ignore it
- Aggression, Dangerous Behavior
and Other Inappropriate Behaviors.....Time-Out

Although time-out is an effective and useful disciplinary response in many settings, it does have its limitations depending upon the behavioral setting and the child's temperament. It is when time-out is ineffective or impractical with young children that the availability of spanking to a parent is necessary to maintain the *authoritative* approach. Furthermore, time-out often requires a back-up or enforcer to eliminate a child's escape attempts. As previous shown, the spank back up is the best choice for many settings and types of children. If deprived of disciplinary spanking, even the most prepared parent is merely left with nagging, begging, negotiating, or yelling, and certainly without the position of authority needed to properly manage the behavior.

For very compliant children milder forms of correction will suffice and disciplinary spanking may never be necessary. For more defiant children who refuse to comply with milder consequences such as time-out, or who refuse to be persuaded by milder consequences, spanking is useful and effective. In order for a corrective response to deter disobedient behavior, the consequence imposed upon the child must outweigh the pleasure of the disobedient act. For some children, sitting in a chair for 2 or 3 minutes is a small price to pay for the control they gain when biting their sibling.

Though disciplinary spanking may be seen as unwarranted by some from the vantage point of a lecturer, most primary care physicians who field parenting questions every day view spanking as necessary. In a 1992 survey published in JAMA using good definitions and behavioral scenarios, 59% of pediatricians and 70% of family practitioners approved of spanking in certain situations.¹⁷ Other physician surveys confirm this support for spanking.^{18,19}

Guarendi Study: Consider the project by Children's Hospital Medical Center of Akron, Ohio headed by clinical psychologist Ray Guarendi to discover the secrets of highly successful families who reared outstanding children.²⁰ The 50 state winners of the teacher-of-the-year award were asked to name the most outstanding children they had taught over the course of their career. The teachers were not to select the highest academic achievers, but the students who exhibited the greatest self-motivation, consideration for others, morality and general strength of character. These students' families were thoroughly studied and spanking was among the many aspects of parenting examined. The study's findings included:

- 70% of the parents of outstanding students employed some physical punishment with their children. Some relied upon it often and others rarely used it. "Spanking was generally considered to be one tool in a parent's discipline repertoire."
- Most began spanking between 18 - 24 months and phased it out by ages 4 - 6 years.
- Spanking was neither the main method nor a last-ditch intervention.
- The occasions when spanking was used:
 1. When teaching a child to avoid potentially dangerous situations.
 2. When punishing for deliberate disobedience.
 3. When punishing for disrespectful behavior.

- Spanking was not used for accidents, childish behavior, or impulsiveness; the parents preferred to employ other consequences for these behaviors.

The study's conclusions about spanking:

1. A majority of parents with outstanding children are willing to spank. They consider it a healthy discipline option.
2. Spanking is not child abuse. Not one of these spanking parents was a child abuser.
3. Spanking does not in and of itself lead a child to be aggressive or to approach problems with a might-makes-right mentality. Consistently, the youngsters in these families were identified as normally mature and sensitive.
4. One need not spank to be a good parent. A significant minority of parents chose not to spank for personal and practical reasons. They neither viewed spanking as the psychological dark side of discipline nor as an out-moded or brutal technique.

VI. Spanking opponents invoke a number of arguments that have superficial appeal, but upon closer scrutiny are inaccurate:

1. Physical punishment establishes the moral righteousness of hitting other persons who do something which is regarded as wrong.

Counterpoint: The "spanking teaches hitting" belief has gained in popularity over the past decade, but has little factual basis. The distinction must be made between abusive hitting and nonabusive spanking. A child's ability to discriminate hitting from disciplinary spanking depends largely upon the parents' attitude with spanking and the parents' procedure for spanking. There is insufficient evidence in the medical literature that a mild spank to the buttocks of a disobedient child by a loving parent teaches the child aggressive behavior.

The critical issue is how spanking is used more so than whether it is used. Physical abuse by an angry uncontrolled parent will leave lasting emotional wounds and cultivate bitterness and resentment within a child. The balanced use of disciplinary spanking, however, is an effective deterrent to aggressive behavior in some children.

Ronald Simons et al.¹³ studied 332 families to examine the impact of corporal punishment and the quality of parental involvement on three adolescent outcomes — aggressiveness, delinquency, and psychological well-being. They found a strong association between the quality of parenting and each of these three outcomes. Corporal punishment, however, was *not* related to these outcomes once the effect of parental involvement was removed. Though corporal punishment of adolescents is not recommended, this study proves the point that quality of parenting is the chief determinant of favorable or unfavorable outcomes.

Remarkably, childhood aggressiveness has been more closely linked to maternal permissiveness and maternal negativity than even abusive physical discipline.²¹

The use of a formal procedure with spanking enhances its effectiveness and diminishes the possibility of misuse. Spanking should always be a planned *action* by the parent, not an angry

reaction.

Spanking should follow a formal procedure:

- Always forewarn the child of the spanking consequence for the particular misbehavior.
- When the misbehavior occurs, escort the child to a private location (child's room or rest room) to avoid public humiliation.
- Administer one or two spansks to the buttocks only.
- Calmly review the reason for the punishment with the child. A distinction should be made between the parent's dislike for the child's behavior, and the parent's unconditional love for the child.
- Offer a hug and restore the relationship. No ridicule or condemning comments should be directed at the child upon completion of the spanking.

Finally, it is ridiculous to imply that children would never hit others if their parents would only exclude spanking from their discipline options. Most children in their toddler years (long before they are ever spanked) will naturally attempt to hit others when conflict or frustration arises. The continuation of this behavior is largely determined by how the parent or caregiver responds. If correctly disciplined, the hitting will become less frequent. If ignored or ineffectively disciplined, the hitting will likely persist and even escalate. Spanking can be a useful component in an overall plan to effectively teach a child to stop aggressive hitting.

2. Spanking teaches a child that power and strength are most important and that the biggest can force their will upon the smallest ("might makes right").

Counterpoint : Parental power is commonly exerted in routine child rearing and spanking is only one example. Other situations where power and restraint are exercised by the average parent include:

- The uncooperative two-year-old who refuses to brush his teeth.
- The young child who insists on running from his parent in a busy mall or parking lot.
- The toddler who refuses to sit in his car seat.
- The young patient who refuses to hold still as a vaccination is administered, or as a laceration is repaired.

Power and control over the child are necessary at times to ensure safety, health and proper behavior. Classic child rearing studies have shown that some degree of power assertion²² and firm control^{4,23} is essential for optimal child rearing. When power is exerted in the context of love and for the child's benefit, he will not perceive it as bullying or demeaning. The issue is not the greater power of parents over that of the young child, which is a fact about the relationship. The issue is how parents will use their greater power for the optimal development of the child.

3. Spanking is violence.

Counterpoint: Disciplinary spanking, as recommended by most primary care physicians¹⁸, is not violence by definition = "exertion of physical force so as to injure or abuse."²⁴ Parents who properly spank do not injure or abuse their child. Neither the intent of a parent nor the result of spanking is violence by definition.

The use of this term in the spanking debate only serves to deepen the confusion. Why do anti-

spanking authors repeatedly fail to distinguish between abusive violence and mild spanking? The distinction is so fundamental and obvious that its omission suggests that these authors use such terminology for its propaganda value, not to clarify the issues.

4. Adults who were spanked as children are at risk for using violence as a means of resolving conflicts as adults.

Counterpoint: This theory comes from work done by Dr. Murray Straus based upon theoretical models and survey results of adults recollecting about having been spanked as teenagers.¹² His work is not clinical research, and many experts believe that his conclusions go far beyond his data. As with most of Dr. Straus' survey research, teenage spanking is the focus, not the selective use of spanking of young children by reasonable parents. The evidence for his conclusion disappears when parental spanking is measured between the ages of 2 and 8 years, and when childhood aggression is measured at a later age.

In a 1994 review article on corporal punishment, Dr. Larzelere presented evidence supporting a parent's selective use of spanking, particularly with children in the 2 to 6 year age range.²⁵ After thoroughly reviewing the literature he concluded that the average association in prospective studies between spanking by parents and later antisocial aggressiveness in children is insignificant (mean $r = 0.03$), artifactual, and *not* due to the child's aggression increasing as a result of spanking.

Longitudinal Studies: The findings of quality prospective longitudinal studies are clear and consistent with respect to a parent's use of spanking and its effect upon the child:

*After more than 10 years of study (Baumrind, 1973):*⁴

Evidence from this study "did not indicate that negative reinforcement or corporal punishment per se were harmful or ineffective procedures, but rather the total pattern of parental control determined the effects on the child of these procedures."(underline added)

*After 10 years of study (Eron, 1994):*²⁶

"Upon follow-up 10 years after the original data collection, we found that punishment [including physical punishment] of aggressive acts at the earlier age was no longer related to current aggression, and instead, other variables like parental nurturance and children's identification with their parents were more important in predicting later aggression."

*After 4 years of focused study (Chamberlain, 1974):*²⁷

Children from authoritarian homes, where physical punishment was often used, were "no. . . more aggressive and resistant" than those from accommodative homes.

*After 3 years of focused study (Simons, 1994):*¹³

"Once the effect of parental involvement was removed, corporal punishment showed no detrimental impact on adolescent aggressiveness, delinquency, or psychological well-being."

The developmental outcome of child-rearing is primarily determined by the overall quality of the parent-child relationship. According to the authoritative model, optimal child development results from a parent's balanced use of firm behavioral control (which may include spanking) and a high degree of nurturance (encouragement and love).⁴ The use of disciplinary spanking during childhood in a nurturing environment is not a predictor of adult dysfunction.

**5. Parents often refrain from hitting until the anger or frustration reaches a certain point-
-the child therefore learns that anger and frustration justify the use of physical force.**

Counterpoint: A recent study indicates that most parents who spank do not spank on impulse, but purposefully spank their children with a belief in its effectiveness.²⁸ Furthermore, the study revealed no significant correlation between the frequency of spanking and the anger reported by mothers. Actually, the mothers who reported being angry were not the same parents who spanked.

Parental hitting after losing control due to anger is unquestionably the wrong way to use spanking. Eliminating all physical punishment in the home, however, would not remedy such explosive scenarios; it could even increase the problem. When effective spanking is removed from a parent's repertoire, he/she is left with nagging, begging, belittling, and yelling once the primary disciplinary measures (i.e., time-out and logical consequences) have failed. Then, in a moment of exasperation, a parent may hit the child. By contrast, if proper spanking is proactively used in conjunction with other disciplinary measures, milder non-spanking consequences will become more effective, better control of the child will be achieved, and moments of exasperation will occur less often.

6. Spanking leads a parent to use harmful forms of corporal punishment which lead to physical child abuse.

Counterpoint: The abuse potential when loving parents use appropriate spanking is very low. Since parents have a natural affection for their children, they are more prone to underutilize spanking than to overutilize it. There is strong evidence against spanking increasing the risk of child abuse:

- Surveys indicate that as many as 90% of parents of preschoolers use spanking,²⁹ yet the incidence of physical child abuse in the America is only five to seven percent. Statistically, the two practices are far apart. The National Committee to Prevent Child Abuse reports that over the past decade reports of child abuse have steadily risen while approval for parental spanking has steadily declined.³⁰
- More than 70% of primary care pediatricians who work everyday with families reject the idea that spanking sets the stage for parents to engage in forms of physical abuse.¹⁹
- Teaching parents appropriate spanking may actually reduce child abuse, concludes Larzelere in a recent review article on corporal punishment.²⁶ Parents who are ill-equipped to control their child's behavior, or who take a more permissive approach (refusing to use spanking), may be more prone to anger²⁹ and explosive attacks on their child.⁴
- Parental child abuse is an interactive process involving parental competence, parental and child temperaments, and situational demands.³¹ Abusive parents are more angry, depressed and impulsive, and emphasize punishment as the predominant means of discipline. Abused children are more aggressive and less compliant than children from nonabusive families. There is less interaction between family members in abusive families and abusive mothers display more negative than positive behavior. The etiology of abusive parenting is multifactorial with emphasis on the personalities involved, and can not be simply distilled down to a parent's methodology of discipline.

- Trickett & Kuczynski³² found in their clinical study of abusive and nonabusive families that abusive parents used punishment as the predominant type of discipline regardless of the type of child misbehavior. They reported being angry and disgusted after disciplinary interventions. Nonabusive parents disciplined their children with a balanced combination of reasoning and punishment (including some spanking), and reported more satisfaction with their efforts.
- Wissow and Roter in a reply to Trumbull, et al.'s Letter to Editor in *Pediatrics* acknowledge that a definitive link between spanking and child abuse has yet to be established.³³
- Finally, the Swedish experiment to reduce child abuse by banning spanking, as they did in 1979, seems to be failing. One year after the spanking ban, the rate of physical child abuse in Sweden was 49 % higher than that of the United States.^{34, 26} According to a 1995 report from the governmental agency Statistics Sweden, the reports of child abuse by family members had risen four fold since 1981 and teen violence was up six fold.³⁵

Most experts agree that spanking and child abuse are not on the same continuum, but are very different entities. With parenting, it is the "user" and *how* a measure is used much more than the measure used that determines the outcome of the disciplinary effort. Clearly, spanking can be safely used in the discipline of young children with an excellent outcome. The proper use of spanking may actually reduce a parent's risk of abusing the child.

VII. Conclusions

1. The spanking debate has become very emotional and political, which has led to inaccurate statements of absolute conclusions where none exist. We must use proper definitions and terminology in objectively evaluating the issue.
2. A majority of parents use spanking with their young children and a majority of pediatricians support its use in certain situations.
3. There is evidence of short-term effectiveness and positive long term outcomes when disciplinary spanking is properly used by parents.
4. There is no established link between ordinary nonabusive spanking and physical child abuse.
5. The effects of disciplinary spanking, or any discipline measure, are determined by the total pattern of parental control and parental nurturance.
6. In implementing the authoritative parenting style, a parent must exercise a moderate degree of behavioral control over the child for optimal development. This will require some punishment and correction. In the rearing of the young child (particularly under 6 years), a parent's control responses are limited. Non-abusive spanking, when properly employed by a parent, is effective, appropriate, and at times necessary. Parents should be allowed considerable latitude in the disciplinary responses they implement, as long as the responses

are not abusive to the child.

7. To deny a parent the use of spanking can result in a loss of control over the child. This can in turn create an environment for detrimental parental practices such as yelling, nagging, belittling, and even explosive outbursts of rage. Furthermore, the child's basic development suffers from a breakdown of the authoritative approach to parenting.

Therefore, parents should be encouraged to pursue a *balanced* approach to child-rearing: equally utilizing both encouragement (nurturance) and firm control (correction and guidance). Non-corporal disciplinary measures should be promoted as the primary corrective responses for childhood misbehavior. Disciplinary spanking should be available to parents to back up or enforce the primary measures when necessary. Guidelines for appropriate disciplinary spanking can be offered to those parents who choose to use spanking.

Guidelines for Disciplinary Spanking **

1. Spanking should be used selectively for clear, deliberate misbehavior, particularly that which arises from a child's persistent defiance of a parent's instruction. It should be used only when the child receives at least as much encouragement and praise for good behavior as correction for problem behavior.
2. Milder forms of discipline, such as verbal correction, extinction, logical and natural consequences, and time-out should be used initially, followed by spanking when noncompliance persists. Spanking has been shown to be an effective method of enforcing time-out with the child who refuses to comply.
3. Only a parent, or in exceptional situations someone else who has an intimate relationship of authority with the child, should administer a spanking.
4. Spanking should not be administered on impulse or when a parent is out of control. A spanking should always be motivated by love for the purpose of teaching and correcting and never for revenge.
5. Spanking is inappropriate before 15 months of age and is usually not necessary until after 18 months. It should be less necessary after 6 years and rarely, if ever, used after 10 years of age.
6. After 10 months of age, one slap to the hand of a stubborn crawler or toddler may be necessary to stop serious misbehavior when distraction and removal have failed. This is particularly the case when the forbidden object is immovable and dangerous, such as a hot oven door or an electrical outlet.
7. Spanking should always be a planned action (not a reaction) by the parent and should follow a deliberate procedure.
 - The child should be forewarned of the spanking consequence for designated problem behaviors.

- Spanking should always be administered in private (bedroom or restroom) to avoid public humiliation or embarrassment.
 - One or two spanks are administered to the buttocks. This is followed by embracing the child and calmly reviewing the offense and the desired behavior in an effort to reestablish a warm relationship.
8. Spanking should leave only transient redness of the skin and should never cause physical injury.
 9. If properly administered spankings are ineffective, other disciplinary responses should be tried again rather than increasing the intensity of spankings. Professional help should be obtained when a satisfactory behavioral response cannot be achieved.
- ** *These guidelines have been developed from input of several pediatricians, psychologists, and psychiatrists.*

Endnote References

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