

## **NOSPANK RESOURCE**

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### **ARTICLE**

WHEREAS the nation's pediatric professionals and children's advocates advise against the use of corporal punishment of children;

WHEREAS research shows that corporal punishment teaches children that hitting is an acceptable way of dealing with problems and that violence works;

WHEREAS there are effective alternatives to corporal punishment of children;

WHEREAS national surveys show that corporal punishment is common and 25% of infants are hit before they are 6 months old;

WHEREAS adopting national policies against corporal punishment has been an effective public education measure in various countries;

WHEREAS accumulated research supports the conclusion that corporal punishment is an ineffective discipline strategy with children of all ages and, furthermore, that it is sometimes dangerous;

WHEREAS studies show that corporal punishment often produces in its victims anger, resentment, low self-esteem, anxiety, helplessness, and humiliation;

WHEREAS research demonstrates that the more children are hit, the greater the likelihood that they will engage in aggression and anti-social behaviour as children imitate what they see adults doing;

WHEREAS in a study of 8000 families, children who experience frequent corporal punishment are more likely to physically attack siblings, develop less adequately-developed consciences, experience adult depression, and physically attack a spouse as an adult;

WHEREAS, according to human rights documents, children, like adults, have the right not to be physically assaulted;

WHEREAS the U.N. Committee on the Rights of the Child has consistently stated that persisting legal and social acceptance of corporal punishment is incompatible with the U.N. Convention on the Rights of the Child;

WHEREAS this resolution is supported by the Massachusetts Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children, Massachusetts Citizens for Children, and the Massachusetts Chapter of the National Association of Social Workers;

BE IT HEREBY RESOLVED that Town Meeting encourages parents and caregivers of children to refrain from the use of corporal punishment and to use alternative non-violent methods of child discipline and management with an ultimate goal of mutual respect between parent and child.

Town Meeting requests that appropriate Town groups such as the Advisory Council on Public Health and PTOs explore how they can raise awareness of this issue, and organizations that deal with children's welfare shall be informed of this resolution.

## **EXPLANATION**

Note: Any attempt to delay or avoid a vote on this resolution may result in resubmission of the resolution to a subsequent Town Meeting.

This voluntary resolution is in no way intended to undermine parental authority or familial autonomy. Its goal is to promote and advocate mutual respectful relationships between children and their parents and encourage thoughtful determination of discipline methods. It seeks to bring attention to this issue and is meant to be a gentle, reasonable, and respectful suggestion. It could result in more support and discussion of options for disciplining children.

Corporal punishment is the intentional infliction of physical pain for the purpose of punishment. Examples of corporal punishment include slapping, spanking, hitting with objects, shaking and pinching. Such incidents are not reported to any agency. Child abuse is already subject to State law and is not the focus of this resolution. Discipline is training to act in accordance with rules of conduct.

A large-scale meta-analysis of 88 studies published by the American Psychological Association, found strong associations between corporal punishment and ten negative outcomes, including eroded trust between parent and child, more aggression toward siblings, bullying, spousal abuse as adults, and other anti-social behaviour.

Gershoff, E. (2002). Corporal punishment by parents and associated child behaviours and experiences: A meta-analytic and theoretical review. *Psychological Bulletin*, 128, 539-579.

## **American Academy of Pediatrics Recommendations**

Parents should be encouraged and assisted in the development of methods other than spanking for managing undesired behaviour. According to the

American Academy of Pediatrics, the following consequences of spanking lessen its desirability as a strategy to eliminate undesired behaviour.

- a.. Spanking children <18 months of age increases the chance of physical injury, and the child is unlikely to understand the connection between the behaviour and the punishment.
- b.. Although spanking may result in a reaction of shock by the child and cessation of the undesired behaviour, repeated spanking may cause agitated, aggressive behaviour in the child that may lead to physical altercation between parent and child.
- c.. Spanking models aggressive behaviour as a solution to conflict and has been associated with increased aggression in preschool and school children.
- d.. Spanking and threats of spanking lead to altered parent-child relationships, making discipline substantially more difficult when physical punishment is no longer an option, such as with adolescents.
- e.. Spanking is no more effective as a long-term strategy than other approaches, and reliance on spanking as a discipline approach makes other discipline strategies less effective to use. Time-out and positive reinforcement of other behaviours are more difficult to implement and take longer to become effective when spanking has previously been a primary method of discipline.
- f.. A pattern of spanking may be sustained or increased. Because spanking may provide the parent some relief from anger, the likelihood that the parent will spank the child in the future is increased.

### **Consequences of Corporal Punishment**

- a.. Children whose parents use corporal punishment to control antisocial behaviour show more antisocial behaviour themselves over a long period of time, regardless of race and socioeconomic status, and regardless of whether the mother provides cognitive stimulation and emotional support (Gunnoe & Mariner, 1997; Kazdin, 1987; Patterson, DeBaryshe, & Ramsey, 1989; Straus, Sugarman, & Giles-Sims, 1997).
- b.. A consistent pattern of physical abuse exists that generally starts as corporal punishment, and then gets out of control (Kadushin & Martin, 1981; Straus & Yodanis, 1994).
- c.. Adults who were hit as children are more likely to be depressed or violent themselves (Berkowitz, 1993; Strassberg, Dodge, Pettit, & Bates, 1994; Straus, 1994; Straus & Gelles, 1990; Straus & Kantor, 1992).
- d.. The more a child is hit, the more likely it is that the child, when an adult, will hit his or her children, spouse, or friends (Julian & McKenry, 1993; Straus, 1991; Straus, 1994; Straus & Gelles, 1990; Straus & Kantor, 1992; Widom, 1989; Wolfe, 1987).

- e.. Corporal punishment increases the probability of children assaulting the parent in retaliation, especially as they grow older (Brezina, 1998).
- f.. Corporal punishment sends a message to the child that violence is a viable option for solving problems (Straus, Gelles, & Steinmetz, 1980; Straus, Sugarman, & Giles-Sims, 1997).
- g.. Corporal punishment is degrading, contributes to feelings of helplessness and humiliation, robs a child of self-worth and self-respect, and can lead to withdrawal or aggression (Sternberg et al., 1993; Straus, 1994).
- h.. Corporal punishment erodes trust between a parent and a child, and increases the risk of child abuse; as a discipline measure, it simply does not decrease children's aggressive or delinquent behaviours (Straus, 1994).
- i.. Children who get spanked regularly are more likely over time to cheat or lie, be disobedient at school, bully others, and show less remorse for wrongdoing (Straus, Sugarman, & Giles-Sims, 1997).
- j.. Corporal punishment adversely affects children's cognitive development. Children who are spanked perform poorly on school tasks compared to other children (Straus & Mathur, 1995; Straus & Paschall, 1998).

### **Alternatives to Corporal Punishment**

- a.. Set firm, consistent, age-appropriate, and acceptable limits. For example, although a 5-year-old child may be able to resist the urge to touch things, it is not reasonable to expect that a 2-year-old will be able to handle such limits. Therefore, parents may need to childproof their homes to protect breakable items, and to keep children away from dangerous objects.
- b.. Teach children conflict resolution and mediation skills, including listening actively, speaking clearly, showing trust and being trustworthy, accepting differences, setting group goals, negotiating, and mediating conflicts.
- c.. Reason and talk with children in age-appropriate ways. Verbal parent-child interactions enhance children's cognitive ability.
- d.. Model patience, kindness, empathy, and cooperation. Parents and teachers should be aware of the powerful influence their actions have on a child's or group's behaviour.
- e.. Provide daily opportunities for children to practice rational problem solving, and to study alternatives and the effect of each alternative.

f.. Encourage and praise children. A nonverbal response such as a smile or a nod, or a verbal response such as "good" or "right" not only provides incentives for accomplishment, but also builds primary grade children's confidence.

g.. Allow children to participate in setting rules-and identifying consequences for breaking them. This empowers children to learn how to manage their own behaviour.

h.. Provide consistency, structure, continuity, and predictability in children's lives.

i.. Encourage children's autonomy-allow them to think for themselves, and to monitor their own behaviour, letting their conscience guide them.

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### **Responses to Cultural Myths**

"Spanking is an effective way to manage behaviour."

Hitting a small child will usually stop misbehavior. However, other ways of discipline such as verbal correction, reasoning, and time-out work as well and do not have the potential for harm that hitting does. Hitting children may actually increase misbehavior. One large study showed that the more parents spanked children for antisocial behaviour, the more the antisocial behaviour increased (Straus, Sugarman, & Giles-Sims, 1997). The more children are hit, the more likely they are to hit others including peers and siblings and, as adults, they are more likely to hit their spouses (Straus and Gelles, 1990; Wolfe, 1987). Hitting children teaches them that it is acceptable to hit others who are smaller and weaker. "I'm going to hit you because you hit your sister" is a hypocrisy not lost on children.

"I got hit when I was a kid and I turned out OK."

Being spanked is an emotional event. Adults often remember with crystal clarity times they were paddled or spanked as children. Many adults look back on corporal punishment in childhood with great anger and sadness.

Sometimes people say, "I was spanked as a child, and I deserved it." It is hard for us to believe that people who loved us would intentionally hurt us. We feel the need to excuse that hurt. Studies show that even a few instances of being hit as children are associated with more depressive symptoms as adults (Strauss, 1994, Strassberg, Dodge, Pettit & Bates, 1994). While many of us who were spanked "turned out OK," it is likely that not being spanked would have helped us turn out to be healthier.

"If we don't spank children, they'll grow up rotten."

Children in eleven countries are growing up without being hit in homes, in daycare or in schools. Norway, Sweden, Germany, Denmark, Austria, Israel, Finland and other countries that have banned corporal punishment of children have remarkably low rates of interpersonal violence compared to the United States. Professor Adrienne Haeuser who studied these educational laws in Europe in 1981 and 1991 said, "Children are receiving more discipline since the

law in Sweden passed. Parents think twice and tend to rely more on verbal conflict resolution to manage their children." Discipline is important. We need more discipline of children such as explaining and reasoning, establishing rules and consequences, praising good behaviour in children and being good models for our children. Such methods develop a child's conscience and self-control. Children are then less likely to misbehave and more likely to become self-disciplined adults.

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[www.endcorporalpunishment.org](http://www.endcorporalpunishment.org)

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### **Ethics**

The harmful consequences of corporal punishment are not primary for some people. For them it is enough that corporal punishment breaches ethical principles by deliberately causing pain to another person. From this perspective, if it is not acceptable to hit a person who is 18 years old or over, then it should not be acceptable to hit a person who is under 18 years old.

### **Statements from Professionals**

"If we are ever to turn toward a kinder society and a safer world, a revulsion of physical punishment would be a great place to start." -Dr. Benjamin Spock

"After nearly two decades of research on the causes and consequences of family violence, we are convinced that our society must abandon its reliance on spanking children if we are to prevent intimate violence." - Richard J. Gelles, Ph.D. and Murray A Straus, Ph.D., sociologists

"The cultural acceptance of violence should be decreased by discouraging corporal punishment at home." -U.S. Surgeon General's Workshop on Violence and Public Health

"Americans need to re-evaluate why we believe it is reasonable to hit young, vulnerable children, when it is against the law to hit other adults, prisoners and even animals." -Psychologist Elizabeth Gershoff, Ph.D., author of comprehensive study on corporal punishment Penelope Leach, John Bradshaw, and Alice Miller have also advised against corporal punishment.