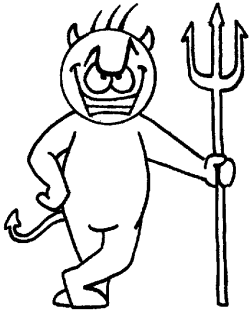


Did You Know?

What About **SPANKING**?

Will It Get the Devil Out of My Child?



Many parents struggle with the issue of spanking as they try to “discipline their child.” They feel challenged to “tame the monster” who ventures out, now and then, suddenly replacing their typically sweet-natured child. Where, they wonder, did this “devil child” come from?

At these moments, parents want to do the right thing. But every one of us has been overwhelmed with helplessness and frustration in a moment of being challenged by a defiant child. It is easy to respond impulsively or angrily with a quick swat on the bottom or a spanking. Some of us still carry with us old, misguided thinking

from our past (“*I turned out all right, so this has got to be good for my child.*”). We trust without question that what was once done to us by our parents is now right for our child. Pain works, right?

Every parent knows they need to set limits if their child is going to learn the difference between right and wrong. They want to teach their child how to get along, to follow the rules, to be respectful of others, and to learn self-control. Certainly, these are important values we should try to teach our children. But the question is: does spanking really teach those lessons?

We (at Mandala) do not believe spanking teaches children positive behaviors. In fact, we believe that striking a child can be damaging to the child and to the relationship between parent and child. We are confident that spanking as a form of discipline is the *least* effective method for building character in children.

Spanking as “Discipline”

Think about it. The goal of discipline is to TEACH a child something--a value, a new behavior, or a consequence. But the goal of spanking is to PUNISH--to hurt, to gain revenge, or to make the child suffer. As Jane Nelson, author of *Positive Discipline*, asks:

“Where did we ever get the crazy idea that in order to make children do better, we must first make them feel worse?”

Many parents mistakenly believe that if you make a child suffer for his misbehavior, he will change his behavior. This is simply not true. Children learn best from positive discipline techniques such as: logical consequences, choices with limits, redirection, problem-solving, firmness that shows kindness and respect, ignoring misbehavior, and giving attention for positive behavior.

Children learn best from Positive Discipline Techniques

- Logical consequences
- Choices with limits
- Redirection
- Problem-solving
- Firmness that shows kindness and respect
- Ignoring misbehavior
- Giving attention for positive behavior

What's So Wrong with Spanking?

- **Spanking breaks the bond of trust between parent and child.** It teaches him that the parent he relies on for care and trust is a source of pain. No human being feels loving towards someone

who deliberately hurts him.

- **Spanking teaches a child that the grown-ups he depends on are dangerous.** It throws him into emotional turmoil.
- **Spanking, or routine threats of spanking or violence teaches a child fear and terror.** (“If you don’t keep quiet, I’m going to sew your mouth shut!”) It teaches him to be fearful of others and makes it hard for him to have good trusting relationships.
- **Spanking teaches children to solve problems with violence and force.** Spanking teaches children that “might makes right”--the one with the most power wins. Spanking models to children that it’s ok to control and tyrannize others when you get old enough and big enough.

- **Spanking creates children who grow up to be bullies.** Spanking perpetuates the “Victim-Bully Cycle” where a child who is victimized at home finds someone smaller to torment at school. Later on, these bullies grow into adults who use physical power or violence with their spouse and/or children. (Research shows that the overwhelming number of battering husbands and wives were routinely spanked.)



- **Spanking increases the likelihood that the abusive cycle will continue from generation to generation.** Boys who were spanked severely grow up to be abusers. Girls who were spanked severely have been shown to marry abusers, become victims of abuse, or physically abuse their own children.

- **Spanking is a physical violation of a child’s body.**

Spanking can cause physical damage, to the tail-bone, the sexual organs, and the sciatic nerve. It can cause bone fractures. Spanking of the buttocks can cause a stimulation of immature sexual feelings which children have no control over. Later on, they may come to associate pain and humiliation with feelings of sexual arousal.

- **Spanking sets children up as easy prey for predators.** Spanking trains children to accept the idea that adults have absolute authority over their bodies, even the right to inflict pain. These children are easy targets for adults who molest, because they have been taught to “obey, or else!”

- **Spanking has a cumulative effect.** Each act, however, brief, does leave a scar. Over time, with routine spankings, the effect of these emotional wounds on a child’s self-esteem is more and more damaging. Spanking teaches shame. It is a humiliating experience. The child feels degraded. Later on, children grow up to seek relief from feelings of worthlessness and rejection through substances that offer temporary relief, such as drugs and alcohol.

- **Spanking seems to work initially because of FEAR.** Fear may get a child to stop a behavior temporarily. But parents have to inflict more and more physical punishment over time in order for it to work. Spanking makes for blind submission or active rebellion. Spanking teaches children to sneak and lie to avoid punishment.

- **Spanking fills a child with anger and the urge to retaliate.** However, this almost never happens directly. Some children vent their anger in fantasy, at younger siblings, or at pets. Other children vent their anger at school when it is not safe to do so at home. In the worst scenarios, the child turns the anger in upon himself and becomes depressed, filled with self-hate. Anger that has been stored inside for a long time can accumulate and be expressed in angry rebellion at adolescence, which may come as a shock to parents. But angry teenagers do not just “fall from the skies.”

- **Spanking does not teach children to solve problems.** In fact, spanking distracts a child from the problem at hand. He becomes preoccupied with feelings of fear (fight/flight/or freeze), and his higher level “thinking brain” turns off. It teaches him nothing about solving problems in the future.

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No matter what we might hope, spanking does not teach the positive behaviors we hope it will. It does not teach children to be kind, to be respectful of other peoples' bodies, to learn responsibility, to make choices, or to make amends for one's actions. Spanking teaches about pain, and pain is what is remembered.

Spanking and Child Abuse

Let's be realistic. Almost every parent has spanked their child in a moment of extreme danger, anger, or desperation. Most feel guilty about it later. The slap or spanking is not a solution, and most parents realize this. The danger is that spanking can work its way into child abuse. "It's better for him to cry than for me to cry" is not a reason for us to spank our children every time we feel upset. We need to be careful not to use this kind of discipline as a convenient way for us to relieve our own frustrations.

In their book, *Disciplining Your Preschooler and Feeling Good About It*, the Golants caution us:

Let us be perfectly clear. A slap on the hand as an immediate attention grabber, in a moment of grave danger, is different from regular and frequent spanking, hitting, or beating. Hitting with objects that can inflict physical harm, such as belts, sticks, or shoes, are clearly abusive. Striking a child so hard as to leave bruises and marks is considered child abuse. This practice is unacceptable and is subject to investigation by protective services and the police.

Teachers and therapists and day care providers are now mandated by law to report such abuse. This has made many parents and mandated reporters uneasy, but we need to remember that the intent of the law is not to punish the parent, but to provide protection and safety for children.



What Happens When You "Lose It"?

Let's face it. We *all* blow it once in a while! We over-react. We become overwhelmed by our own feelings, and we yell or say hurtful things or strike our child. There are no perfect parents. The important thing is to do some self-reflection later (out of the heat of the moment) and to be honest with yourself and with your child.

The first step is to ask yourself: What happened?

What was going on inside *me*? How did I (or the situation/my child) get so out of control? What can I do differently next time? Is this a rare incident or is this a pattern in my way of handling problems with my kids? Are there issues in my past that are getting brought up for me? Is this signaling that I'm over-stressed and need to look at making some changes? Is my child trying to express a need that I haven't been seeing? Talking all this over with a trusted friend can be a real help. Sometimes a spouse can see things more clearly. Parenting and mothers' groups offer wonderful sources of support and growth. If the issues are deeper, or if there is a pattern there, sometimes talking with a therapist can begin to "unhook" us. The key is to know when we need to ask for help.

What was going on inside me?

- *How did I get out of control?*
- *Is anger becoming a pattern for me?*
- *Do childhood wounds need healing?*
- *Am I overstressed?*
- *Am I feeling isolated and alone?*
- *Do I need to look at self-care?*
- *Do I need to ask for help?*

The second step is taking care of the relationship with your child. If you feel you've gone too far, don't be afraid to admit your mistake to your child. This can go a long way to ease his pain and repair broken trust. Saying, "*I'm sorry. I didn't mean to hurt you.*" or "*I'm sorry. I had a bad day at work today. I didn't mean to yell at you.*" speaks the truth and honors the child's feelings. Best of all, you are modeling that you can make mistakes and make amends--a wonderful gift to give your child. Better yet, make a promise that you won't ever physically hurt your child. Then make sure you keep it. Parents need support and encouragement, not blame. And we believe children need the same.

Sources: *Disciplining Your Preschooler and Feeling Good About It* by Mitch and Susan Golant (1989), *Plain Talk About Spanking* by Jordon Riak, *Breaking Down the Walls of Silence* by Alice Miller (1993), *Positive Discipline* by Jane Nelson (1989, 2006).

