

JUPITER IMAGES

Should spanking young children be banned?

California recently tried to introduce a bill making it illegal to spank children younger than 4 years old. If it had passed, the state would have become the first to make the corporal punishment of infants and toddlers a misdemeanor punishable by up to a year in jail and a \$1,000 fine. More than a dozen countries, mostly in Europe, already have laws against spanking.

Critics of the bill argue that it would be impossible to enforce a ban against such a common practice and that education, not legislation, is the method of choice to improve parenting practices, with the exception of those that are clearly abusive.

What do you think?



Find out more about this topic on the Web:

- www.aap.org/advocacy/childhealthmonth/spank.htm
- www.corpun.com/rules.htm
- http://whqlibdoc.who.int/publications/2006/9241594365_eng.pdf

YES

from members:

Noelia Hernandez
Gypsum, CO



Talking is the way to deal with situations.

Mario Calafatello
Miller Place, NY



A child may be harmed at a young age.

Vivian Le
West Covina, CA



Kids under 4 are too young to understand right or wrong. There are other methods of punishment instead of spanking.

NO

from members:

John Sorrow
Nashville, TN



Punish little children when they misbehave, not to the point of abuse, but warm their little bottoms up. That should be the only place you hit.

Lorraine Patterson
Kent, WA



A light swat on the leg sometimes corrects dangerous behaviors. The law should understand the difference between abuse and discipline.

Ali Esmaili
Lakewood, OH



I had a few slaps on the wrist growing up, which probably kept me out of trouble and on the path to becoming a physician.

from experts in the field:



John E. B. Myers is a professor of law at the University of Pacific, Sacramento. He has authored several books and articles on the subject of child abuse, which have been cited by more than 150 courts, including the U.S. Supreme Court.

AN INCREASING BODY OF research indicates that corporal punishment is not benign and that it has harmful long-range consequences for some children. "Normal" corporal punishment during childhood is a risk factor for negative outcomes in adulthood, including substance abuse, depression, suicidal thoughts and poverty. ("Normal," or, as the law would call it, "reasonable," corporal punishment would be spanking on the bottom with an open hand. Slapping the face, hitting with a closed fist or using an implement such as a belt is "unreasonable." Leaving bruises is likewise "unreasonable.")

While most parents who spank do not inflict serious physical injury, the sad fact is that every year in the United States thousands of children—usually babies and toddlers—are seriously injured or killed by adults whose corporal punishment got out of hand because the adult was furious and "just lost it." The danger that corporal punishment will go too far and hurt or kill a child is highest when parents are furious. The result is tragedy. Approximately 1,200 children—almost all of them babies and very young toddlers—die every year from abuse and neglect. Many of these deaths result from parents inflicting corporal punishment.

If corporal punishment were banned, the idea that "hitting is OK" would be replaced with the idea that "hitting is never OK." When children raised without corporal punishment become parents, and when they become furious—as they will—they are not likely to injure or kill their child.

In 1998, the American Academy of Pediatrics concluded that the negative consequences of corporal punishment outweigh any benefits, and that parents should not spank. A growing number of countries, including Austria, Cyprus, Denmark, Finland, Germany, Iceland, Israel, Latvia and Norway, have outlawed corporal punishment. These countries report no adverse consequences to the move, and the consensus is that the ban is a good idea.

In the United States, banning corporal punishment could save thousands of children every year from injury or death. [4]

from experts in the field:



Virginia Shiller, Ph.D., is a child and family therapist, lecturer at the Yale Child Study Center and author of *Rewards for Kids! Ready-to-Use Charts & Activities for Positive Parenting* (American Psychological Association, 2003); www.rewardsforkids.com.

I AM NO FAN of spanking as a disciplinary technique—there simply are much more positive ways to help children improve their behavior.

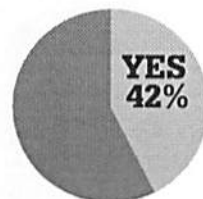
Surprisingly, research on the effect of spanking is far from conclusive in showing long-term negative consequences. In fact, studies show that other things that parents may do—such as failing to be emotionally involved with children or being overly permissive—can lead to more harm than mild, infrequent spankings. Certainly, the harsher the corporal punishment, the more harmful the consequences are likely to be, but this is why we have laws against child abuse.

Sweden pioneered the anti-spanking movement, passing a law in 1979 that prohibited spanking. In the early 1980s, Sweden experienced a swing toward parental permissiveness, and parents reported that they did not know how to discipline if they could not physically punish their children. The Swedish experiment suggests that any efforts to discourage spanking must be accompanied by education to help parents learn a new repertoire of parenting techniques, such as using positive incentives, modeling appropriate behaviors, addressing underlying problems and giving mild consequences for misbehavior.

An additional concern is that legislation against spanking might disproportionately punish the poor and members of minority groups. Researchers have found that spanking is more common when mothers are young and living in poverty. Also, a large national study found that when women of similar economic background were compared, more African-American than Caucasian mothers reported spanking their preschoolers. Interestingly, research suggests that the effects of spanking may differ among minority groups; with African-American families there is simply less evidence of harm. The cultural or emotional context in which spanking occurs may have an influence that we don't yet understand, so we should be cautious in writing new legislation.

Rather than trying to legislate away parental spanking, I believe we should promote parental support and education. Ironically, the notion of punishing parents for spanking their kids sounds a bit like "Just give them a swat." [4]

**APRIL
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to donate their organs?



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