



Spanking: Is it an Effective Discipline Method?

Spanking has been used over the years to discipline young children. Today, there has been much debate on whether or not spanking works and is appropriate. Research clearly shows that spanking is ineffective and may lead to increased issues for children.

Some researchers argue that if parents stop spanking their children, the likelihood of child abuse will be reduced. For example, one study found that spanking was used as an initial or first discipline technique by parents who moved on to more intensive forms of physical punishment in a high number of child abuse cases.

Other researchers have found that spanking results in the following:



It is less effective than using time outs.



It can be confusing and terrifying to a child because someone who cares for and loves him or her is causing him or her physical pain.



It sends mixed messages to children and results in them learning to behave only when there is a threat of physical violence.



It can make it difficult for a child to internalize a parent's explanation for why he or she was spanked.



It can induce feelings of fear, anger, and sadness.



It has been linked to increases in mental health issues and delinquent and criminal behavior in childhood and adulthood, negative parent-child relationships, and a higher risk of child abuse.



It is associated with more childhood aggression.

Spanking Violates Human Rights

Many human rights organizations consider spanking a form of corporal punishment and violence. Also, a number of national organizations—such as the American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry, the American Academy of Pediatrics, the National Association of Pediatric Nurse Practitioners, and the National Association of Social Workers—have banned the use of spanking and recommend that parents use other forms of non-physical discipline techniques.






Recommended Parenting Strategies to Address Undesirable Behavior

As mentioned in the Take Root program, in order to keep your child safe and help him or her thrive, you can use the following 3 steps in response to your child's displays of unwanted behavior:

1



Stop
Take a Moment to tune into what you are feeling and seeing.

2



Breathe
Ask yourself, "What is my child's behavior trying to tell me?"

3



Think
Figure it out together—you and your child.

Strategies for Avoiding Challenging Behaviors

To help avoid challenging behaviors in your toddler, do the following:



Give your child many chances to feel and be competent.

Invite him or her to help you put napkins on the table, water the plants, dust, or carry his or her ball to the park. Feeling competent and capable will help your child learn that he or she can manage some tasks and build his or her confidence.



Keep your child's frustration level as low as possible.

Is your child tired? Hungry? This may not be the time to run errands. Is the new puzzle too difficult? Put it away, and bring it out again in a few weeks or months. Is it too hard to blow bubbles? You be the bubble blower and let your child be the bubble popper.



Keep your frustration level as low as possible too.

Toddlers have the amazing ability to tune into the adults who are closest to them. If you're upset, your child will sense your unhappiness or stress. So, consider the little actions and the big ones you can engage in to help yourself feel as calm and as steady as possible. For example, keep your child's toys picked up so you don't step on one. If you need a break or some adult company, call someone from your Circle of Support (see Take Root: 0-6 Months) to vent, request to meet for a walk in the park, or ask for child care so you can take a break.



Ways to Set Limits and Respond When Your Toddler Tests Them



Take a breath.

Remember, this behavior will not last forever. Talk with other parents and you will find out that other children behave in difficult ways too.



Set only a few clear, consistent, and doable limits.

Examples include: Take off your shoes when you come into the house; no climbing on the coffee table; and we wash our hands before dinner.



Offer realistic choices to help your child feel in control.

For example, you could say, "Do you want to wear your yellow shirt or your blue one? Would you like to eat watermelon or a peach? Shall we put the puzzle together or read a book?"



Respond in predictable, consistent, clear, and respectful ways when your child tests limits.

Keep your focus on your child's behavior.



Notice positive behaviors.

Behaviors you praise are likely to be repeated.



Responding to a Meltdown

If, despite your best efforts, your toddler has a meltdown, use the following guidance:



Stay present.

Even when your child is "losing it." Even when he or she grabs a friend's toy or hits a child in the sandbox, your presence is steady and reassuring.



Keep your eye on your child, and be ready to step in as needed.

This could be offering a hug or another toy or removing your child from the situation.



Tell your child how you feel about his or her behavior.

"I know you're upset, but I don't want anyone to get hurt when you choose to throw a block. I will sit here to help you stop throwing things." In another example, you could say, "You wanted to walk into the street, but that is dangerous. So, I took your hand and said, 'We have to walk on the sidewalk.' You got very angry and frustrated, so I sat with you, and you calmed down."



Give your child words for what he or she might be feeling.

"You got upset when I said, 'No more crackers.' You kicked and screamed, and your feelings were big." Another example is, "I know you wanted to play with the elephant, but Louis has it now. It can be very hard to wait. Let's count to 10, and then it will be your turn."

**When things calm down, talk about other ways to handle the situation.**

For example, suggest that your child stomp his or her feet or take a deep breath when he or she feels upset. Reassure your child that you—and other family members or adults—are available to help him or her, and suggest to your child that he or she calls you when he or she begins to feel upset or frustrated.

**Notice when your child controls his or her feelings and behavior.**

"I saw from your face that you were angry and may have wanted to push Henry, but you stomped three big stomps instead. That was a good way of managing your feelings

Parenting can be challenging, especially during times that require you to discipline your child due to his or her behavior. However, using some of the strategies listed, such as setting limits and responding appropriately to your toddler when he or she is having a meltdown, can assist you in managing your child's behavior.

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