

GROWING UP

Say No Thanks to Spanking

By Dan Florell, Ph.D. & Praveena Salins, M.D.

Owww! The scream of pain can be heard on the other side of the house. It is an all too familiar scream as Johnny has once again pulled his sister's pigtails. The mother hustles from the living room to give Johnny a spanking while she yells, "how many times does this need to happen before you learn to stop pulling your sister's pigtails!"

This type of situation is very common where a parent gets frustrated with a child's behavior and resorts to spanking. Even though most parents have heard that spanking is bad for children, it can be a hard habit to break. After all, their parents spanked them and they turned out ok.

The difficulty in breaking the spanking habit is that the reason for not spanking is poorly understood. There are several reasons why pediatricians and psychologists recommend against using spanking. The first reason is that the punishment often does not match the crime. In other words, the spanking is often more severe than the misbehavior would warrant. This happens frequently as we have yet to see any parent spank a child that is not a bit angry or emotional. When a parent gets angry and then spansks, it can be hard to adjust the number of spanks and the force of each spank. Discipline always needs to have the punishment match the crime.

A second reason for not using spanking is the lesson it teaches children. While the lesson most parents hope for when they use spanking is for the child to not do the misbehavior again, this is not the lesson the child learns. What the child learns is that a bigger person can make a smaller person do whatever he wants them to do. This lesson can backfire as the child grows into an adolescent and gets bigger than the parents.

A third reason is that spanking simply does not work most of the time. The main purpose of spanking, along with any other punishment, is to decrease a behavior. If a parent has to continually spank a child for the same type of behavior, then spanking has not been effective in reducing the child's behavior. This means it is time to move onto something else. It has been interesting to observe parents who will quickly stop doing time out because it does not reduce the behavior but will continue to spank even when spanking does not work.

There are many ways to get a child to behave in a socially appropriate manner. Most are more effective than spanking. The next time you might think about spanking your child, take a minute and think if there is a better way to discipline. If you are unfamiliar with different disciplinary techniques, ask your pediatrician or mental health professional.

Biography:

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