

## REACH Program: Anger and Parenting Corporal Punishment



*Let's talk about corporal punishment.*

- *How many men were on the receiving end of corporal punishment when you were children?*
- *Who dispensed it in your families? Give me a show of hands for moms? Dads? Both?*
- *Did they use hands only, or objects like belts, switches, spoons?*
- *What sorts of issues did they use it for?*
- *When did it stop? How many people had a 2-way physical battle with a parent at some point?*

## Justifications for Corporal Punishment

- Making better citizens: “My kids will get into more trouble if I’m too soft with them.”
- Justice: “Some offenses are so severe that C. P. is called for, so that my kids will have an idea of justice.”
- Respect: “I want my kids to respect me and other adults, and they won’t if I’m too soft.”



*[Do not click screen or show overhead yet] I'm not sure what your individual stance is here about corporal punishment—for it against it, or mixed. We may have a chance to find out later. For now, let's pretend for a while that each of you is in favor of it, like most of our parents were. If you were trying to defend the use of corporal punishment in raising children, what sorts of arguments would you use? Give me some examples for how it may be justified.*

*[Do Brainstorm]*

*Here are some of the justifications that are often used. [Click mouse or show overhead slide].*

## Does Corporal Punishment Make Better Citizens?

- Children whose parents use corporal punishment are significantly more likely to
  - Severely attack a sibling
  - Be violent in their later marriages
  - Engage in delinquent behavior
  - Physically abuse their own children
  - Drop out of school before graduation
  - Spend time in jail as adults

(Murray Strauss, *Beating the Devil Out of Them*, 1994)



*[Don't show overhead slide until after the brainstorm. If you are using computer presentation, show title, but don't show text until after brainstorm].*

*OK, let's shift stance. Let's pretend that you are against corporal punishment, and wanted to argue against a person who was maintaining that this helped children to become better citizens. What would you say to this view?*

*[Do brainstorm. Some group members may continue to argue in favor of c. p. Simply remind them that their task is to argue against it during this portion of the discussion].*

*Great. [show slide]. Let's look at some conclusions gathered from extensive research into c. p. Children who received c. p. were found to be significantly more likely to*

- *Severely attack a sibling*
- *Be violent in their marriages as adults*
- *Engage in delinquent behavior*
- *Physically abuse their own children when they are adults*
- *Drop out of school*
- *Spend time in jail as adults*

*In other words, according to this research, controlling for other factors, corporal punishment seems to create significantly worse citizens, both as children and as adults. What effect would this information have on the person who is trying to justify corporal punishment in terms of citizenship?*

## Does Corporal Punishment Reduce Antisocial Violence?

- Parents report that they are most likely to use corporal punishment in response to a child's violence against another child or an adult (41% would hit)
- However, children learn by what we *do* more than what we *say*. If we are violent when someone is outrageous or won't listen to reason, children will learn to do this, too
- *Corporal punishment encourages children to be more violent*



*Even those parents who are reluctant to use corporal punishment in situations like a child's crayoning on a wall or refusing to do homework say they are most likely to use it in response to a child's violence towards another child or adult (41% would hit the child). The rationale seems to be, "I need to use c. p. to stop my child from becoming violent."*

*However, the data suggests that hitting under these circumstances makes the child more, not less violent.*

*Short-term, c. p. may stop the child's violence. But long-term, the child is more likely to be violent. Suppose I were given a choice of fire extinguishers. One fire extinguisher contains a chemical which would dramatically reduce the flames for a day, but which would cause a major flare-up the following day. The second fire extinguisher would not be as dramatic as the first, would reduce the flames gradually, and extinguish them completely only after significant, patient work. But the second extinguisher didn't have the disadvantage of causing the later flare-up. Which fire extinguisher would you choose?*

## The Two Extinguishers

- Short-term dramatic success, but long-term, it makes worse fires
- Short-term it works slowly and unimpressively, but long-term it reduces future fires

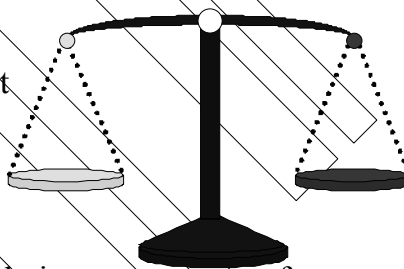


- *Short-term dramatic success, but long-term, it makes worse fires*
- *Short-term it works slowly and unimpressively, but long-term it reduces future fires*

## Does Corporal Punishment Help Teach Justice to Children?(1)

Suppose:

- Corporal punishment worked to change behavior
- We were perfect judges
- We knew the perfectly just consequence for a child's misbehavior was one hit at level 25, on a scale of 1-100
- We were a little *angry* at the misbehavior



*[Again, do not show slide until after brainstorm]*

*Let's take the argument that c. p. teaches children justice. The argument is that I need to teach my children how the adult world operates, that great offenses have great consequences. If my son cuts his sister with a pocketknife, it doesn't seem to teach him justice if I only take a toy away or deny TV privileges.*

*How would you address this argument?*

*[Show slide].*

*Let's suppose:*

- *Corporal punishment is effective in stopping antisocial behavior (This is questionable from the data we reviewed before, but let's just suppose this, for the sake of the argument)*
- *We are perfect judges (again, not likely, but let's assume this for the sake of argument) and know perfectly the appropriate strength of a hit that would be the just consequence for the misbehavior (say 25 on a scale of 1-100)*
- *We were somewhat angry at the misbehavior.*

## Does Corporal Punishment Help Teach Justice to Children? (2)

- Suppose that, In the process of executing the hit, there was some adrenaline in our systems, and we hit the child at a 30 level instead of a 25
- Due to anger, we have been unjust. The just punishment would have been a 25. We have abused our children at a 5-level
- *Unless we are entirely without anger, we will forever represent injustice to our children, not justice*



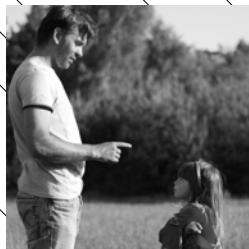
*Anger causes adrenaline to go into my system, giving me more physical energy. At the same time, the amygdala becomes activated, reducing my ability to judge things accurately. So if there is adrenaline in the bloodstream and amygdala activity, there is a high likelihood that I might hit a little too hard while administering what I thought was “justice.” Let’s say I hit my child at a 30 level instead of 25—not much higher, but higher than I intended.*

*Due to the anger, I have been unjust, since I have hit harder than the 25. The 25, by my own logic, would have been justice. The extra 5 is abuse. I will not be a representative of justice to my child. Whenever she wishes to conjure an image of unfairness or unwarranted punishment, she will conjure my face.*

*Even if corporal punishment were effective in teaching justice, I would need to renounce it until I was a perfect anger manager. Because anger distorts my sense of my own strength and my judgment, if there is any anger in me at all, I am likely to abuse my children.*

If I do not use corporal punishment,  
my children will not learn to respect  
authority

- Fear-parenting
- Respect-parenting



*Let's look at the respect argument. The argument is that my children will not respect me as an authority figure unless they know I am willing and able to dispense corporal punishment when necessary. They will laugh in my face when I tell them to do something, and laugh in the faces of other authority figures.*



## Fear-Parenting

- I behave out of worry about the parent's retribution
- When the parent is absent, I may misbehave because there is no concern for reprisal
- Apologies are avoided because they forfeit power, cause the parent to feel shame
- When I become as strong as the parent, there is a battle. I break free of the parent's control, because I don't fear him/her any more



*Let's look at different styles of parenting. We'll call the first fear-parenting, where the child behaves out of apprehension about what the parent might do if he misbehaves.*

- *When the parent is absent, I maintain good behavior only if I am convinced the parent may discover me. If I convince myself there is no fear of reprisal, my misbehavior increases.*
- *There are no apologies from the parent, because apologies forfeit power. The child apologizes only when there is no other recourse, because he has learned to avoid responsibility for misdeeds.*
- *The relationship between the child and the parent is defined as a power struggle, and heads towards the day when the child's power—physical, economic, or emotional—is equal to that of the parent. At that point there is a crisis when the child breaks free of the parent's control.*

## Respect-Parenting

- I behave due to my respect for the values the parent represents
- When the parent is absent, behavior remains honorable, because I still honor the values
- My parent may apologize and maintain respect, because the values he/she represents are still honored: “I fell short”
- In teenage years, there is a debate about values, not a Darwinian struggle for domination: “Which values are most honorable?”



*Respect-parenting is not power-centered; it is principle-centered. My parent aspires towards certain values, and represents those values to the child. As a child I learn respect, not just for my father, but for the principles which orient his life.*

- *When my father is absent, my behavior remains constant, because the principles my father represents hold true whether he is around to witness my behavior or not.*
- *My parent may apologize and maintain respect, because the values which orient him still matter: “I fell short.”*
- *In the teenage years, there is a debate about values, not a Darwinian struggle for domination. “Which values are most honorable?”*

## Respect vs. Fear

- Threatening violence teaches children fear, not respect
- I gain my children's respect by acting respectably, not by threatening violence
- Respect means "to look again," to look at what happened from the standpoint of a higher value
- I am less concerned with my children respecting *me* than honoring the *principles* which guide me



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## Is Corporal Punishment Defensible as Christian Parenting?

- The “rod” referred to in the Bible is the shepherd’s staff—not used to beat the sheep, but to comfort them and encourage them back to the fold
- The New Testament God rules by love and forgiveness. The God of the Old Testament ruled by wrath and vengeance.
- Christian parenting should model parenting after Christ, who loved children and taught mercy and forgiveness, not wrath and revenge

Philip Greven, *Spare the Child*



*At times, Christian teachings are used as justifications for corporal punishment. There are numerous references to the “rod of correction” in Proverbs, and these references are the source of the (non-Biblical) proverb “Spare the rod and spoil the child.” But Biblical scholars have pointed out that the “rod” referred to in Proverbs is a shepherd’s staff, which is used to comfort and gently correct sheep and bring them back to the fold. The shepherd’s staff is not used to beat sheep into submission.*

*Philip Greven, in his book Spare the Child, suggests that parenting emphasizing corporal punishment is perplexing, coming from a religion whose central figure is Jesus. Jesus ruled not by wrath and vengeance, but by love and forgiveness. Christian parenting, he suggests, would be parenting by these same principles of love, mercy, and compassion.*

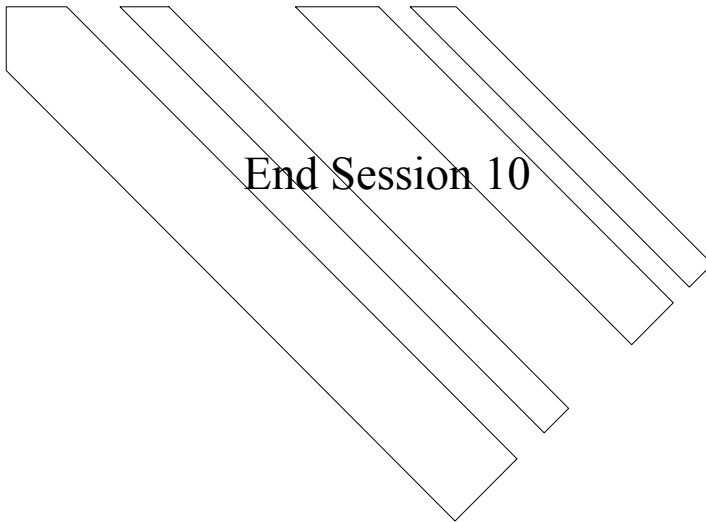
## Review

- Corporal punishment
  - Makes worse, not better citizens, causing greater violence
  - Teaches *injustice*, not justice, unless I am a perfect anger manager
  - Teaches *fear*, not *respect*. Respect is taught by my acting honorably



### *Corporal punishment*

- *Makes worse, not better citizens, causing greater violence*
- *Teaches injustice, not justice, unless I am a perfect anger manager*
- *Teaches fear, not respect. Respect is taught by my acting honorably*



**End Session 10**



*End Session 10*