



Physical Punishment

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All children misbehave. Every parent faces the challenge of how to discipline his or her child. It can be frustrating when a child acts out or has significant behavior problems.

Children need limits and rules. There are many ways to give children rules and help change their behavior. Examples include positive reinforcement, time-out, taking away of privileges, and physical punishment. Physical punishment, sometimes called corporal punishment, is anything done to cause pain or discomfort in response to your child's behaviors.

Examples of physical punishment include:

- spanking (one of the most common methods of physical punishment)
- slapping, pinching, or pulling
- hitting with an object, such as a paddle, belt, hairbrush, whip, or stick
- making someone eat soap, hot sauce, hot pepper, or other unpleasant substances

Parents who were physically punished as children are more likely to physically punish their own children.

Physical punishment may influence behavior in the short-term. However, physical methods of discipline can result in the following consequences in your child:

- bullying other children
- being aggressive
- behavioral problems
- fearing his or her parents
- poor self-esteem
- thinking that hitting is okay
- increased risk of depression, anxiety, and personality problems

In extreme situations, physical punishment can lead to more severe and abusive behavior towards children. Abuse can cause injury, loss of custody, arrest, jail-time, and in even the death of a child.

Other Options for Managing Behavior

There are many ways to encourage your child to have good behavior. The most important place to start is to have a healthy, positive, and supportive relationship with your child. Managing your child's behavior works best when you let your child know in advance what you expect of him or her. Clear limit setting provides children with a sense of safety, stability, predictability, and security. Make sure you also praise your child's good behavior. Praising a good behavior is called positive reinforcement and leads to more of that behavior.

As a parent, it can be overwhelming to try and find an effective method of discipline. If you are using physical punishment, consider using other methods to promote good behavior in your child. If you have trouble with other approaches, speak with your child's pediatrician, a child and adolescent psychiatrist, or another qualified mental health professional about the behavioral problems your child is experiencing.

For more information on effective discipline methods, please see our *Facts for Families*

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