

American Academy of Pediatrics Updates Policy on Corporal Punishment

Mounting evidence shows that spanking is ineffective and harmful, and AAP calls for it to be banned

ORLANDO, FLA – Corporal punishment – or the use of spanking as a disciplinary tool – increases aggression in young children in the long run and is ineffective in teaching a child responsibility and self-control. In fact, new evidence suggests that it may cause harm to the child by affecting normal brain development. Other methods that teach children right from wrong are safer and more effective.

The American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) strengthens its call to ban corporal punishment within an updated policy statement, "Effective Discipline to Raise Healthy Children," (<http://pediatrics.aappublications.org/cgi/doi/10.1542/peds.2018-3112>)" which will be presented during the group's 2018 National Conference & Exhibition in Orlando.

The policy statement, to be published in the December 2018 issue of Pediatrics also addresses the harm associated with verbal punishment, such as shaming or humiliation. The AAP supports educating parents on more effective discipline strategies that teach appropriate behavior and protect the child and others from harm.

"The good news is, fewer parents support the use of spanking ([/English/family-life/family-dynamics/communication-discipline/Pages/Where-We-Stand-Spanking.aspx](http://English/family-life/family-dynamics/communication-discipline/Pages/Where-We-Stand-Spanking.aspx)) than they did in the past," said Robert D. Sege, MD, PhD, and a past member of AAP Committee on Child Abuse and Neglect, an author of the policy statement. "Yet corporal punishment remains legal in many states, despite evidence that it harms kids - not only physically and mentally, but in how they perform at school and how they interact with other children."



Dr. Sege will discuss the statement during a news conference at 9:30 a.m. Friday, November 2 in the Orange County Convention Center, Room 221A. Also speaking will be Jennifer Shu, MD, FAAP, Medical Editor of HealthyChildren.org, and co-author of Baby & Child Health.

Corporal punishment and harsh verbal abuse may cause a child to be fearful in the short term but does not improve behavior over the long term and may cause more aggressive behaviors (</English/ages-stages/toddler/Pages/Aggressive-Behavior.aspx>), according to the AAP. In one study, young children who were spanked more than twice a month at age 3 (</English/ages-stages/preschool/Pages/Tips-to-Survive-the-Terrible-3s.aspx>) were more aggressive at age 5. Those same children at age 9 still exhibited negative behaviors and lower receptive vocabulary scores, according to the research.

Research has shown that striking a child, yelling at or shaming them can elevate stress hormones and lead to changes in the brain's architecture. Harsh verbal abuse is also linked to mental health problems (</English/health-issues/conditions/emotional-problems/Pages/default.aspx>) in preteens and adolescents.

Experts hope to help families devise more effective disciplinary plans that help them to maintain a calm and controlled demeanor.

"It's best to begin with the premise of rewarding positive behavior," said Benjamin S. Siegel, MD, FAAP, co-author of the policy statement. "Parents can set up rules and expectations in advance. The key is to be consistent in following through with them."

AAP recommends that pediatricians use their influence in office visits to help parents with age-appropriate strategies for handling their child's discipline. They also may refer families to community resources for more intensive or targeted help.

The policy statement provides educational resources where physicians and parents can learn healthy forms of discipline, such as limit setting, redirecting and setting expectations.

AAP also opposes corporal punishment in schools, which is addressed in a separate policy statement (<http://pediatrics.aappublications.org/content/106/2/343>) published in 2000.

"There's no benefit to spanking," Dr. Sege said. "We know that children grow and develop better with positive role modeling and by setting healthy limits. We can do better."

Additional Information from HealthyChildren.org

- What's the Best Way to Discipline My Child? (</english/family-life/family-dynamics/communication-discipline/pages/disciplining-your-child.aspx>)
- How to Give a Time-Out (</english/family-life/family-dynamics/communication-discipline/pages/time-outs-101.aspx>)

- [How to Shape and Mange Your Young Child's Behavior \(/English/family-life/family-dynamics/communication-discipline/Pages/How-to-Shape-Manage-Young-Child-Behavior.aspx\)](/English/family-life/family-dynamics/communication-discipline/Pages/How-to-Shape-Manage-Young-Child-Behavior.aspx)
- [Disciplining Older Children \(/English/family-life/family-dynamics/communication-discipline/Pages/Disciplining-Older-Children.aspx\)](/English/family-life/family-dynamics/communication-discipline/Pages/Disciplining-Older-Children.aspx)

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