

Teaching Guide

## The Spanking Controversy

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### **Overview**

Angie turns to her parent support group after she spans six-year-old Cole because he ignores her repeated reminders to look both ways before going in the street.

She joins other parents who also spank, one for religious reasons, another because if it's good enough for my dad, it's good enough for me. Still another parent ardently opposes spanking, believing if we don't spank dogs, why do we spank our children? A child development specialist explains why spanking might work in the short term but have negative long term effects.

Angie agrees that parents spank because they feel desperate and angry, not because they think spanking is a great teacher for children.

She evaluates other disciplinary strategies.

### **Objectives**

After viewing and discussing video with its non-threatening approach, viewers will learn:

- recent research about spanking's effectiveness versus other popular disciplinary strategies.
- why parents spank.
- what spanking teaches.
- effective alternatives to spanking.
- the relationship of spanking to a parent's anger.
- how discipline rests on understanding what children are ready to learn.

## Questions & Activities

1. The video opens with Angie's attempts to get Cole in the car for his haircut appointment. What do you think of her parenting? What suggestions would you make to her? Suggest a natural consequence for his behavior.

2. Angie spanked Cole when he ran into the street after his basketball. Discuss this incident. Suggest a logical consequence that could discipline Cole.

*(The basketball might be put away for a week.)*

3. Parents often repeat the same child rearing practices their parents used, without examining current insights in child development. Were you spanked as a child? If so, how did spankings make you feel? Did spankings improve your behavior?

Discuss "When the child becomes a teenager and physical punishment is no longer an option, discipline becomes even more difficult." Do you agree? Do you plan to spank your children?

4. If someone hits you, how do you feel? Do you think you can learn a new behavior after being hit?

*("The best time to give swimming lessons is not when someone is drowning."  
Dr. Haim Ginott)*

5. The video shows a parent support group. Do you think meeting with other parents could help parents with discipline?

Discuss the tips for starting a support group on page 10.

What are situations where time out is especially effective? *(When a child hurts another child or destroys something.)*

6. The video states, "Learning can only take place when a child is developmentally ready, and readiness varies from child to child." Discuss the readiness chart on page 11 of this guide.

7. What European countries ban parents from spanking their children? (*Sweden, Austria, Norway, Denmark, and Cyprus*) *These nations have remarkably low rates of interpersonal violence compared to the United States. Children do not appear to be more "spoiled" than in this country, according to Professor Adrienne Haeuser, who studied these laws in Europe.*

*"Children are receiving more discipline since the law in Sweden was passed", said Dr. Haeuser.*

*"Parents think twice and tend to rely more on verbal conflict resolution to manage their children."*

8. Rhonda claims that spanking works. How many viewers agree? What evidence is there that spanking does not work?

*(While spanking may relieve a parent's frustration and stop misbehavior briefly, according to the American Academy of Pediatrics (1995), researchers suggest that spanking may be the least effective discipline method. To test this hypothesis, researchers surveyed parents, with the assumption that if spanking worked, children who were spanked would learn to behave better over time so that they would need punishing less frequently.*

*However, the results showed that families who start spanking before their children are a year old are just as likely to spank their 4-year-old children as often as families who do not start spanking until later. Thus, children appear not to be learning the lessons parents are trying to teach by spanking.)*

Spanking may be ineffective because it does not teach an alternative behavior. In fact, children usually feel resentful, humiliated, and helpless after being spanked

9. Discuss these statements from the video:

“Spanking may work short term, but the more you spank the less it works. It’s like a drug. You need a larger dose each time to make it work. And when it comes to spanking, “a larger dose” can mean physical abuse.”

“Two-thirds of mothers of children under six who spank them admit that they spank at least three times a week.”

“We say to kids, “hitting is wrong!” When we spank them, we teach, “Hitting is O.K.”

“Some studies show the more physical punishment children receive, the more often they hit their siblings. They grow into adults who hit their spouses.”

### **Anger**

10. The video claims that parents spank to release their frustration and anger more than they spank to teach a child. Discuss “Most parents don’t spank to encourage this behavior or punish that one. They spank because they feel desperate with no other options.”

Discuss ways for parents to handle their anger, using the handout on page 9.

11. Discuss how children often express their anger. Are some expressions of anger more acceptable than others? List in two columns acceptable and unacceptable ways to express anger.

12. Report on possible physical effects of striking a child.

*A severe blow to the buttocks, with an instrument like a piece of wood, could cause bleeding in the muscles surrounding the sciatic nerve. Hitting a child can also injure the tail bone. When children must bend over for beatings, their sex organs may be injured. The child's hand is particularly vulnerable. Striking the hands of younger children is especially dangerous to the growth plates in the bones which, if damaged, can cause deformity or impaired function. Boxing on the ear can burst an eardrum.*

13. Research the long term effects of spanking. (According to Dr. Murray Strauss, in ***Beating the Devil out of Them: Corporal Punishment in American Families*** (Free Press) when spanking is the primary discipline method, it may have harmful long-term effects such as increasing the chances of misbehavior, aggression, violent or criminal behavior, impaired learning, and depression.)

14. Research your state's policy on spanking.  
(Example: The Oklahoma legislature passed a bill allowing parents to spank their children in public.)

### **Spanking & Religion**

15. Many parents who spank do so because of religious beliefs.

*Discuss this, using page 7 in this guide.*

*Have viewers prepare a debate on spanking, using the opposing articles by Den A. Trumbull et. al. and Tim Johnson cited in the Internet resources on page 12.*

## Spanking and Religion

Fundamentalists and other Evangelicals who believe in the inerrancy of the Bible feel it imposes a religious obligation to physically punish children.

They believe discipline of children is important from an early age, and that corporal punishment is the only effective method.

Some point out that a child who is forced to accept punishment from his parents is more likely to accept it from God as an adult.

The Family Research Council analyses spanking from a conservative Christian perspective. Although they advocate spanking as a disciplinary method, they severely restrict its use.

They differentiate between “*abusive hitting and non-abusive spanking.*”

Verbal corrections, time outs, and logical consequences should be the most common discipline.

They suggest that parents reserve spanking for situations where non-compliance persists after non-physical disciplinary methods.

Give the child “at least as much encouragement and praise for good behavior as correction for problem behavior.”

Discipline in private. Avoid public humiliation.

They hold that spanking is inappropriate before 15 months. It should be less necessary after six years.

They recommend a single slap to the hand of a young child, and one or two spanks to the buttocks of an older child.

They advise that if spanking is ineffective, don't increase the severity of hitting. Seek professional help and/or try other disciplinary techniques.

## **Time Out Policies for Toddler & Preschoolers**

- Count to ten to give the child a chance to cease the misbehavior.
- Use time out immediately when the child does not follow your directions.
- Follow through with time out. Don't just threaten.
- Keep calm. Don't show anger or yell at the child.
- Use no more than ten words and ten seconds to quickly get child into time out.
- Use a straight back chair where the child can be seen.
- The time out space should be boring to the child, with no toys, television etc. It should be safe, well lit and not frightening to the child.
- Don't let the child hear you discuss his behavior.
- Use a portable ticking timer which a child cannot reach, but can hear. Timers prevent a parent from forgetting to release a child from time-out.
- Leave a child in time out one minute for each year of life.
- Don't give the child attention while in time-out.
- After the time out, discuss the misbehavior.

Adapted from **The Time-Out Solution** by Lynn Clark, Ph.D. and **The Time-Out Prescription** by Donna G. Corwin (Contemporary Books.)

## Parents & Anger

Here are some guidelines for handling anger when children misbehave.

**Keep a journal** of what behaviors provoked your anger. Watch for “spillover anger.” As Willard Gaylin describes it in ***The Rage Within***: “Returning from a frustrating... day at work, a parent... Will find any excuse to explode at the safer but more vulnerable people around him rather than at the indifferent and threatening authority who generated the rage. An infraction that would be ignored under normal circumstances produces a sudden and violent outburst.”

**Plan in advance** how you wish to react the next time your child misbehaves.

**Take a time out.** Leave the room. It demonstrates how serious you believe the situation is and models self-control. The child also has time to cool down.

**Calm yourself..** Tell yourself to calm down. Take deep breaths.

**Keep your statements short.** Focus on solutions to the problem. Don't use the misbehavior as a springboard for discussing past misbehaviors.

**Don't threaten when angry.** An angry parent may threaten something that is unenforceable, such as “You are grounded until you're 18.”

## Starting a Parent Support Group

Parents benefit greatly when they meet in a group to share experiences, and provide support.

- **Get the word out.** Publicize the group through child care centers, schools etc.
- **Keep it small.** Limit membership to 12 or less.
- **Meet regularly.** A home or public place such as a library or community center are both suitable. One and a half hours is appropriate.
- **Nonviolence.** No physically and emotionally violent interactions are acceptable.
- **Keep learning.** Invite child development specialists to speak to the group. View and discuss videos on parenting and child development.
- **Provide child care.** Find a child care provider to care for children during the support group.
- **Appoint a membership leader.** One parent should phone members to encourage attendance.
- **Share leadership.** Parents can rotate leadership.
- **Give opportunity to share.** Begin by asking parents to tell the issues they want discussed.
- **Confidentiality.** What is said in the group should stay in the group.

## **Readiness and Tasks**

Children are developmentally ready for tasks at different stages. Children may be ready earlier or later than suggested for the jobs listed here. Proper training and supervision are, of course, necessary.

### **Three to Four-year-olds**

- Hang up clothes
- Match socks
- Set table with silverware
- Unload silverware from dishwasher
- Put dirty clothes in hamper
- Clean up spills

### **Five to Six-years-old**

- Vacuum
- Dust
- Load dishwasher
- Make sandwiches

### **Seven to Eight-years-old**

- Learn to use microwave
- Scrub bathroom sink and tub
- Pack school lunches

*Adapted from **Pick Up Your Socks** by Elizabeth Crary.*

### **Internet Sites Dealing with Spanking**

Trumbull, Den A. and Ravenel, S. DuBose, *Spare the Rod? New Research Challenges Spanking Critics* (Family Research Council). This is written from a fundamentalist Christian perspective.  
[www.orc.org](http://www.orc.org)

This site on “corporal punishment” contains links to various research critical of anti-spanking studies.  
<http://people.biola.edu/faculty/paulp/>

This site contains links to several anti-spanking sites.  
[www.neverhitachild.org](http://www.neverhitachild.org)

Pediatrician Dr Bill Sears’ site has a section on discipline with “Ten reasons not to hit a child.”  
[www.askdrsears.com](http://www.askdrsears.com)

Website of the American Psychological Assn.  
[www.apa.org/releases/spanking.html](http://www.apa.org/releases/spanking.html)