

Discipline to Prepare Children for a Nonviolent Future

A commitment to nonviolence invites us to ponder questions, such as: Is spanking violence? Do children have a fundamental right to the dignity of the individual? What protections do individuals in their formative years need? ¹

A majority of parents in the U.S. spank their children. ² Though many equate the word “discipline” with punishment, the word comes from the Latin *disciplina*, which means “teaching, learning.” What does the practice of spanking teach? Parents who hit are modeling hitting, showing children that it’s okay to hit others, especially if you’re bigger.



The results of numerous studies show just one upside and numerous downsides to the practice. Spanking usually has the effect of immediate compliance with parental demands. It can also make the child more aggressive with peers, which can continue into adolescence and adulthood, resulting in domestic violence. Other lasting effects include depression, anxiety, and behavioral problems. ³

Nonviolent discipline does not mean zero discipline. Some of the effective methods include communication, guidance, teaching social skills, and positive reinforcement.

Ideas that can help change a habit of spanking:

- Wait five minutes. ² Think about the alternatives and weigh the pros and cons. A cooling-off period is especially important if you are angry when you spank. Time-out for adults helps you get to a more rational place and demonstrates to your child a way to handle being angry. ⁴
- Learn about your child’s stage of development and take it into account when responding. Two-year olds say “no” because they are still learning language and beginning to separate from their parents. Acknowledging their feelings, offering choices, and staying firm can help. Making a game out of clean-up time can keep kids and adults smiling.

- Let children know you've appreciated their behavior whenever it's been acceptable. Use descriptive words so they know what specifically was appropriate and can choose the behavior again.
- Child-proof your home. A toddler's nature is to explore everything! To be able to do so in a safe environment preserves a sense of wonder. When the child is old enough, explain why some things are off-limits.
- Plan ahead for stressful situations and let children know the plan. Trips to the grocery store can be fun if the child is allowed to help, such as gathering items or even choosing certain ones to buy.⁵
- When something upsetting has happened, or there's a new event coming up, walk through the event to teach a desired way of responding.⁶
- Teach the use of "apology of action." Help the child work to repair (as much as possible) the harm that was done. A torn book can be taped. Kind words, written and/or dictated, can help heal unkind words.⁷

*There is
No Way to Peace.
Peace is The Way.
~ A. J. Muste*

Sources:

1. *Convention on Rights of the Child.* www.unicef.org/crc/index_30229.html
2. *To spank or not to spank?* <https://extension.tennessee.edu/WebPacket/Pages/WP-2014-09-ResponseToSpanking.aspx>
3. *The Science of Spanking: What Happens to Spanked Kids When They Grow Up?* upworthy.com/the-science-of-spanking-what-happens-to-spanked-kids-when-they-grow-up
4. *Parents' Anger: Turning Down the Heat in Your Home.* centerforparentingeducation.org/library-of-articles/anger-and-violence/parents-anger-turning-down-the-heat-in-your-home/
5. *Grocery Shopping with Young Kids.* webmd.com/parenting/features/grocery-shopping-kids
6. *Role Playing Scenarios.* parentcoachplan.com/role_playing.php
7. *A Protocol for Teaching Apology of Action.* edutopia.org/pdfs/stw/edutopia-stw-louisville-sel-protocol-for-teaching-apology-of-action.pdf

Other Organizations Working for Children and Nonviolence:

- Peace Educators Allied for Children Everywhere ~ peaceeducators.org
- Campaign for A Commercial Free Childhood ~ commercialfreechildhood.org
- Teachers Resisting Unhealthy Children's Entertainment ~ truceteachers.org