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Children Should Never, Ever, Be Spanked No Matter What the Circumstances

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There are many reasons why children should never be spanked or subjected to any other kind of corporal punishment. Three of the most fundamental reasons:

1. Spanking has serious harmful side effects that parents have no way of seeing, because such effects do not show up until later.
2. Spanking is no more effective than other methods of correction and control, and it is therefore unnecessary to subject children to the risk of the harmful side effects.
3. Spanking contradicts the ideal of nonviolence in the family and society.

Progress is being made toward the goal of nonviolence in the family. Assaults on partners have decreased (Straus, 1995). Fewer and fewer parents and professionals who advise parents approve of spanking (American Academy of Pediatrics, 1998; Schenck, Lyman, & Bodin, 2000; Straus & Mathur, 1996). There has also been a large decrease in the percentage of parents who use corporal punishment (CP) with *school-age children* (Straus & Stewart, 1999).

No one is sure about the reasons for these important changes. In addition, there are some paradoxical aspects to the trend away from CP. One paradox is that, although only about half of American parents now believe that spanking is sometimes necessary (Straus & Mathur, 1996), 94 percent of parents still spank toddlers (Straus & Stewart, 1999). A second paradox is that although ever-larger percentages of professionals who provide information to parents are opposed to spanking, few directly advise parents not to spank. Even fewer advise parents to *never* spank.

Given these paradoxical discrepancies, one objective of this chapter is to draw on the research evidence to explain the discrepancy between what parents believe and what they actually do, and the discrepancy between what professionals who advise parents believe and what they actually advise.

A second objective is to identify the implications of the research evidence for advising parents about spanking and other forms of CP. A particular focus is on whether parents should be advised to *never* spank or to use other forms of CP under any circumstance. The analysis suggests a third paradox: Focusing almost exclusively on helping parents learn alternative strategies to CP unwittingly contributes to *perpetuating* CP.

❖ THE THREE PARADOXES

It is important to identify the conditions that explain why almost everyone spans toddlers, because that can contribute to understanding *disciplinary strategies used by parents* and to developing methods to help parents shift to nonviolent discipline strategies. The three paradoxes about spanking provide a framework for explaining why almost everyone spans toddlers, and what to do to change that.

Paradox 1: Approval of Spanking Has Decreased, But Spanking Toddlers Has Not

Most aspects of CP have changed in major ways in the last generation. The percentage of parents who believe that CP is necessary

dropped from 94 percent in 1968 to 55 percent in 1999 (Straus, 2004). The percentage of parents who hit adolescents has also dropped by about half—from about two-thirds in 1975 to one-third in 1995 (Straus & Stewart, 1999). Despite these major steps away from CP, 94 percent of the parents of toddlers in our most recent national survey used CP. Moreover, other studies show that parents who spanked toddlers did so an average of about three times a week (Giles-Sims et al., 1995; Holden, Coleman, & Schmidt, 1995). Obviously, we need to understand why parents who “don’t believe in spanking” continue to hit toddlers and do it so frequently.

Paradox 2: Professionals Opposed to Spanking Fail to Advise Parents to Never Spank

- Many pediatricians, nurses, developmental psychologists, and parent educators are now opposed to CP, at least in principle. Yet when I suggest to these professionals that it is essential to tell parents to *never* spank or use any other type of CP, with rare exception, that idea has been rejected. Some object because they believe that it would turn off parents. Some object because they think parents would not know what else to do, and children would not receive proper direction and discipline (see Straus, 2001b). They argue for what some call a “positive approach,” by which they mean teaching parents alternative disciplinary strategies, as compared to the “negative approach” of advising to never spank. As a result, the typical pattern is to say nothing about spanking.

- Both the movement away from spanking and an important limitation of that movement are illustrated by the publication of the “Guidelines for Effective Discipline” of the American Academy of Pediatrics (1998). This publication recommends that parents avoid CP. However, it carefully avoids saying *never* spank. The difference between advising parents to avoid spanking and advising them to never spank may seem like splitting hairs. However, the typical sequence of parent-child interaction that eventuates in CP (described later) suggests that, in the absence of a commitment to *never* spank, even parents who are against spanking are likely to continue to spank toddlers.

Paradox 3: Focusing Exclusively on Teaching Alternatives Results in Almost Everyone Spanking

- This paradox grows out of the combination of the high short-run failure rate of all methods of correcting and controlling the behavior of

toddlers and the myth that spanking works when other things do not. As will be shown later in the chapter, when toddlers are corrected for a misbehavior (such as for hitting another child or disobeying), the "recidivism" rate is about 50 percent within two hours and about 80 percent within the same day. Consequently, on any given day, a parent is almost certain to find that so-called alternative disciplinary strategies such as explaining, deprivation of privileges, and time out, do not work. When that happens, because our culture teaches that spanking works when other things have failed, parents turn to spanking. The result is the infamous statistic "94 percent of parents spank toddlers."

Because these paradoxes are rooted in cultural myths about spanking, it is necessary to consider the research evidence on the two most directly relevant: the myth that spanking is harmless if done by loving parents, and the myth that spanking may sometimes be necessary because it works when other methods do not (see Straus, 2001b, for other myths about spanking).

❖ THE MYTH THAT SPANKING IS HARMLESS

In a meta-analysis of 88 studies, Gershoff (2002) located 117 tests of the hypothesis that CP is associated with harmful side effects such as aggression and delinquency in childhood, crime and antisocial behavior as an adult, low empathy or conscience, poor parent-child relations, and mental health problems such as depression. Of the 117 tests, 110, or 94 percent, found evidence of harmful effects of CP. This is an almost unprecedented degree of consistency in research findings. A number of these studies controlled for parental warmth, and showed that CP is harmful even when done by loving parents. However, because the reviewed studies were cross-sectional, it is just as plausible to interpret most of them as showing that misbehavior, delinquency, and mental illness cause parents to use CP in their attempts to deal with those problems.

That interpretation has become dramatically less plausible since 1997. Seven studies that mark a watershed change have become available since then. These are "prospective" studies that take into account the child's misbehavior at Time 1 as well as whether or not the parents used CP. They examine the *change* in behavior subsequent to the CP. These studies therefore provide evidence on whether responding to the misbehavior by spanking benefited the child in the sense of resulting in

a better-behaved child as measured two or more years later (as most parents think), or harmed the child in the sense of *increasing* misbehavior and mental health problems three years later. *All* of these prospective studies found harmful, not beneficial, effects.

The first two of these studies found that, on average, spanked children had an *increase* in misbehavior two years later, whereas unspanked children had a *decrease* in misbehavior (Gunnore & Mariner, 1997; Straus, Sugarman, & Giles-Sims, 1997). A study by Brezina (1999) found that CP was associated with a subsequent increase in the percentage of children who hit a parent. Simons, Lin, and Gordon (1998) found that, when children whose parents used CP were in high school, they were more likely to hit a dating partner than were children whose parents had not spanked at the start of the study.

Three of my studies (Straus, 2004) found that, after controlling for many other variables, CP use at the start of the study was associated with:

- A slower rate of cognitive development than children who were not spanked
- Lowered scores on a test of educational achievement
- An increased probability of crime as an adult

❖ THE MYTH THAT SPANKING WORKS WHEN OTHER METHODS FAIL

The idea that spanking works when other methods fail may be the most prevalent myth about spanking. Even people who do not believe in spanking on philosophical grounds or because of the evidence of harmful side effects tend to think that spanking works when other methods have failed. For example, Dr. Lewis R. First of Children's Hospital, Boston, said he was opposed to CP, but he also said, "If a child repeatedly runs into traffic, for example, you may want to play the big card" (Lehman, 1989). This seeming contradiction probably occurred because, for Dr. First, protecting the safety of the child was even more important than avoiding CP. But it is based on the mistaken assumption that spanking works when other things do not.

If it is true that spanking is effective when other methods have failed, eliminating spanking would be a questionable goal. Fortunately there is excellent evidence on this issue from rigorous experiments and

also from a carefully done short-term prospective study. There is also a great deal of less definitive evidence on the effectiveness of spanking relative to other discipline techniques. For example, a large body of experimental research on animals shows that punishment, including corporal punishment, is not more effective than other modes of training, especially reward.

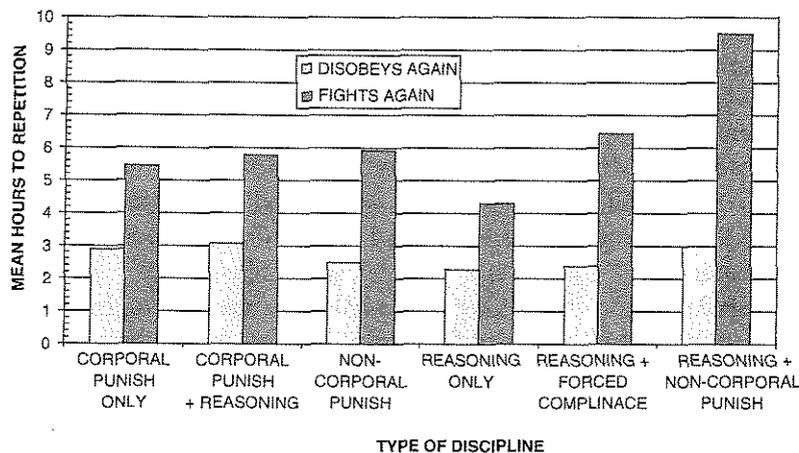
To adequately examine the effectiveness of spanking, it is important to distinguish between effectiveness in three time periods: in the immediate situation, in the short run (the next few hours or days), and in the long run (months or years subsequent to the misbehavior that was corrected).

Immediate-Situation Effectiveness

Spanking for Breaking Time Out. The most definitive evidence that spanking is no more effective than other modes of discipline is from experimental studies that randomly assigned spanking as one of the means of correcting a child who leaves the time-out chair before the time is up. Experiments by Roberts and colleagues (Day & Roberts, 1983; Roberts, 1988; Roberts & Powers, 1990) demonstrated that spanking was no more effective than other methods of training a child to remain in time out for the specified time. An example of an alternative to spanking for breaking time out is what they call the "escape-barrier" method. For the escape-barrier method, a child who breaks time out is placed in a room with a waist-high piece of plywood held across the open door for a period of only one minute. The barrier method required an average of eight repetitions before the child was trained to stay in time out by himself, but so did spanking. On average, it took 8.3 spankings to secure compliance. In addition, the spanked children engaged in more disruptive behavior (such as yelling and whining) before achieving compliance. In short, spanking had the same failure rate as the barrier method. If repeated enough times, spanking also had the same success rate as other methods. The key is that, with toddlers, on average, nothing works without repetition, including spanking.

Spanking for Disobedience and Fighting. Larzelere, Schneider, Larson, and Pike (1996) studied the discipline techniques used by mothers of 40 children ages 2–3. They asked the mothers to use a "discipline record" form to write down each misbehavior for a sample of days. The mothers entered the nature of the misbehavior and the type of corrective

Figure 9.1 The Number of Hours Until a Toddler Repeats a Misbehavior Is About the Same No Matter What the Parents Do to Correct the Misbehavior (2,853 Instances of Disobedience and 785 Instances of Fighting by 40 Children Age 2–3).



SOURCE: Larzelere & Merenda, 1994, Tables 2 & 3.

measure that was used. The results were similar to the experiments on teaching children to observe time out. They showed that *all* methods of discipline had a high short-term failure rate as measured by the number of hours until the child repeated the misbehavior. The “recidivism rate” for misbehavior by the toddlers was about 50 percent within two hours. A few children repeated the misbehavior within two minutes. By the end of the day, 80 percent had repeated the misbehavior.

Figure 9.1 compares six discipline scenarios in the average number of hours until a repetition of the misbehavior occurred. An effective discipline method is one that not only stops the behavior, but also teaches the child to not do it again. Therefore, the longer the time before the misbehavior reoccurs, the more effective the method. Using this measure of effectiveness, Figure 9.1 shows that the six discipline types had about the same degree of effectiveness.

CP, either alone or in combination with reasoning, worked no better than reasoning alone, noncorporal punishment alone, reasoning and CP, and so on. However, there was one combination of discipline methods that does seem to be more effective. It is the right-hand bar in Figure 9.1. It shows that children whose mothers used “reasoning and

noncorporal punishment” avoided fighting again longer than the children of mothers who used other methods, but the difference was not large enough to be statistically reliable.

Other Studies. Another study that contradicts the idea that spanking teaches a lesson that children won’t forget comes from interviewing a representative sample of 1,002 mothers in two Minnesota counties (Straus & Mouradian, 1998). The mothers were asked what was the last misbehavior for which they had spanked their child. They were then asked if they had previously spanked for that misbehavior. Seventy-three percent said they had previously spanked for that misbehavior. This can be interpreted as showing that spanking had a 73 percent failure rate.

A study by Fower and Chapieski (1986) observed 18 mothers interacting with their 14-month-old children. They recorded the children’s response to requests by the mother. Given the age of the children, all of these had to be relatively simple requests, such as “Come here” and “Put than down.” The children whose mothers rarely or never spanked failed to comply with the mother’s requests in 31 percent of the interactions, whereas the children whose mothers relied on spanking did not comply in 49 percent of the interactions observed. This means that spanking was associated with a 58 percent *greater* rate of misbehavior. Thus CP was, on average, less effective in teaching a lesson the child will not forget than were noncorporal disciplinary strategies.

Although this study involved only 18 children, and neither this study nor the Minnesota study were experimental or prospective studies, when combined with the experimental and longitudinal studies the weight of the evidence strongly indicates that it is a myth that spanking works when other methods fail. Spanking is no more effective than noncorporal modes of correction and control, as the longitudinal studies show, and in the long run is less effective or counterproductive.

❖ WHY SPANKING IS NO MORE EFFECTIVE—AND
PROBABLY LESS EFFECTIVE—THAN OTHER METHODS

The Short Run

There is little doubt that spanking will, on average, stop misbehavior, at least at that moment. But why is such a strong step no more effective than nonviolent discipline in “teaching a lesson” that

lasts even a few hours or days? A main reason is that, as shown in Figure 9.1, with toddlers, *every* mode of discipline has a high short-term failure rate. With spanking, however, at least two other things interfere with it working better than other methods of correction and control.

Spanking Interferes With Cognitive Functioning. Being slapped or spanked is a frightening and threatening event that arouses strong negative emotions such as humiliation, sadness, and anger. Children also experience CP as highly stressful (Turner & Finkelhor, 1996). Fright, stress, and other strong negative emotions can result in cognitive deficits such as erroneous or limited coding of events and diminished elaboration (Heuer & Reisberg, 1992; Meerum Terwogt & Olthof, 1989). To the extent that spanking arouses such emotions, it interferes with learning. Moreover, it can evoke resentment and defiance, which further impede learning and may be part of the explanation for the long-term boomerang effect of spanking.

Spanking Does Not Provide an Explanation of the Problem. The effectiveness of spanking is also limited because toddlers and infants may not understand the reason for being hit. Imagine a toddler who is pushing food off a highchair tray. The parent says "Stop that!" When the child does it again, the parent slaps the child's hand. Toddlers do not understand that pushing food off the tray creates a mess and therefore do not understand why they are being hit. The same principle applies, and perhaps more strongly, to being spanked for doing something that is potentially dangerous, such as touching a food mixer while watching a parent prepare dinner. The child who is spanked for doing that may come away with the idea that the danger is the parent, because the child does not understand the idea of "potential danger." The learning from these situations comes from the parent also *explaining* what is wrong with pushing food off a tray or touching a mixer and probably occurs despite the CP rather than because of it.

The Long Run

The research evidence clearly shows that, in addition to being no more effective in the short run, in the long run, spanking is *less* effective. What could account for the lower effectiveness of spanking compared to other methods of correction and control?

Less Well-Developed Conscience. One of the earliest hints of the long-run problems with spanking was in a study by Sears, Maccoby, and Levin (1957) of 379 five-year-old children. They found that spanking was associated with a less adequately developed conscience. Spanking teaches a child to avoid misbehavior if a parent is watching, or will learn about it, rather than avoiding misbehavior because the parents have explained why some things are right and others wrong. When parents explain, children gradually understand and accept these standards, and they are likely to remain in effect in situations when no parent is present, and probably also for life. Proponents of spanking, of course, believe that this is what spanking accomplishes, but Sears, Maccoby, and Levin (1957) and many others since then (see Gershoff, 2002) have found the opposite.

Feasibility of External Control Diminishes With Age. The long-term effectiveness of spanking is also low because, from school age on, children are increasingly out of sight of the parents. Hence, reliance on external controls such as spanking puts a child at an increased risk of misbehavior because, as a child grows older, the feasibility of external controls diminishes.

Weakens Child-to-Parent Bond. Although most children accept the legitimacy of parents spanking, they also resent it and feel angry with their parents for doing it. Many even say they hated their parents for doing it (Straus, 2001a, p. 154). Because spanking or other legal CP typically continues for 13 years (Straus & Stewart, 1999), bit by bit, this anger and resentment chips away at the bond between parent and child (Straus & Hill, 2004). A strong child-to-parent bond is important because children are more likely to accept parental restrictions and follow parental standards if there is a bond of affection with the parent. A strong bond facilitates internalizing the rules for behavior and developing a conscience. Many empirical studies, starting with Hirschi (1969), have found a link between a weak parent-child bond and juvenile delinquency (Hindelang, 1973; Rankin & Kern, 1994; Wiatrowski & Anderson, 1987).

Decreased Opportunity to Acquire Cognitive and Social Skills. When parents explain *why* they are spanking, the adverse effect of spanking is reduced but not eliminated (Larzelere, 1986). More generally and also more importantly, to the extent that a parent decides, either as a

first resort or a last resort, that they have to spank, it denies the child an opportunity to observe and participate in conflict resolution strategies that are important in many life situations. Children of parents who do not spank and whose parents enforce the rules by explaining, negotiating, and creating appropriate alternatives and compromises are to *that extent more likely to themselves acquire and use these vital skills.*

❖ WHY IS CORPORAL PUNISHMENT
PERCEIVED AS MORE EFFECTIVE THAN IT IS?

Research showing that CP is no more effective than other discipline techniques, even as a last resort, fly in the face of what almost everyone thinks, including people who do not believe in spanking. Why just about everyone think this, despite the evidence of their own experience *with having to spank repeatedly*, and despite the research evidence, cries out for an explanation. If these are the scientific facts and the facts of daily experience, why do parents believe that spanking is so effective? A number of different processes probably come together to produce this belief.

Selective Perception of Effectiveness

Even though every parent can observe the short-run high failure rate of spanking, few perceive it. The selective perception results from the cultural belief and expectation that spanking is effective. When a child misbehaves and the parent explains and the child does it again, the repetition is attributed to the ineffectiveness of reasoning with a young child. But, as explained previously, when a parent spansks and the child does it again, it is not perceived as indicating the ineffectiveness of spanking, but as indicating the need to spank again. As the time-out experiments show, repetition of spanking does result in compliance, but these same experiments also show that the repetition of *just putting* the child back in the time-out chair is equally effective and is accompanied by less disruptive behavior such as crying, yelling, and whining.

Confusion With Consistency and Perseverance. The studies reviewed previously show that all methods of discipline, including spanking, have a high failure rate with toddlers. It takes a great deal of time and many repetitions for a young child to internalize standards of behavior.

When non-spanking methods are used, and the child repeats the misbehavior, parents give up after a few tries and turn to spanking as a presumably more effective solution. They do not know the results of the research that shows that *all* methods, including spanking, have a high short-run failure rate. Ironically, when parents turn to spanking, or when they use spanking in the first place, they will spank over and over again, until the child does learn. They then attribute the success to the spanking, not the consistency and persistence of the discipline.

The consistency and persistence displayed by spanking parents in doing it over and over again is exactly right, but unfortunately, applied to the wrong method. When parents are as consistent and persistent in the use of other methods of discipline, they are as or more successful than spanking, but without the increased risk of the serious harmful side effects.

Emotional Gratification

Another part of the explanation may be that, when a child misbehaves and repeats the misbehavior and the parent is angry and frustrated, hitting the child may be emotionally rewarding in the sense that it can be experienced as relieving frustration over the child's misbehavior.

Confusion With Retribution

Part of the reason for spanking despite the evidence that it is not an effective form of punishment is the idea of "just deserts" or retribution. The belief that children should "pay" for their misbehavior is a moral principle, not an indication of change in the behavior of the child. However, when a child is made to pay for his or her misbehavior, it is probably often confused with effectiveness.

Long-Term Effects Are Not Observable

Finally, spanking is perceived as more effective than it is because parents cannot see the long-term harmful effect. If an effect such as delinquency or depression is going to occur, it rarely does so until months or years down the road. Moreover, when there is delinquency or depression, the possibility that it is the result of CP is so inconsistent with the cultural myth that spanking by loving parents is harmless that

it is almost unimaginable. The only way parents can know about these links is by being informed of the results of the research showing that spanking increases the probability of delinquency, depression, and other maladaptive behaviors.

❖ BENEFICIAL VERSUS HARMFUL SIDE EFFECTS

Table 9.1 summarizes the evidence on the effectiveness of spanking as compared to other discipline strategies. The last row of the table on side effects, and especially the lower right cell, requires additional comment.

All methods of discipline are likely to have side effects, that is, to result in behaviors by the child that were not necessarily part of the behavior the parent intended to influence. The side effects of spanking are overwhelmingly to produce behaviors that the parents would not want if they had been able to choose, as shown by 110 of the 117 studies reviewed by Gershoff (2002). The side effects of other modes of discipline, while not the direct focus of much research, are beneficial. Take as an example one of the pioneer studies of CP by Sears, Maccoby, and Levin (1957), which found that noncorporal methods of discipline have the side effect of the child developing a stronger conscience and being less physically aggressive.

When parents use hitting as a method of discipline, the side effect is a child who does a lot of hitting. Similarly, when parents consistently use explanation and reasoning as a means of correcting and influencing the child, the side effect is likely to be a child who uses and insists on a lot of explanation and reasoning. Ironically, this is a side effect that

Table 9.1 Effectiveness and Side Effects of Corporal Punishment Compared to Noncorporal Discipline

<i>Effectiveness and Side Effects</i>	<i>Corporal Punishment</i>	<i>Noncorporal Discipline</i>
Immediate Effectiveness	High	High
Short-Term Effectiveness (hours, days)	Low	Low
Long-Term Effectiveness (months, years)	Makes worse	High
Side Effects	Harmful	Beneficial

in the short run can be a problem, because a child who uses and expects a reason and an explanation for everything can be exasperating, even infuriating. However, while that behavior may be exasperating from a child, it represents exactly the kind of behavior that most parents want to see in their child as an adult.

❖ WHY "NEVER SPANK" MUST
BE THE ADVICE TO PARENTS

Spock (Spock & Rothenberg, 1992) and many others now advise parents to "avoid spanking if you can." That seems like sensible advice. However, as noted earlier, within the same day 80 percent of toddlers will repeat a misbehavior for which they were corrected, no matter what the mode of discipline. This means that almost all parents who follow the advice to "avoid spanking if you can" will conclude that they can't avoid it because they have seen with their own eyes that the alternatives did not work. They fall back on the myth that spanking works when other methods have failed, not realizing that *all* methods of discipline have a high failure rate with toddlers. Because of this set of circumstances, reliance on teaching alternative disciplinary techniques by itself is not sufficient. They must be advised to *never* spank.

Unless child psychologists, parent educators, pediatricians, and others who advise parents communicate an unambiguous "Never spank" message, almost all toddlers will continue to be spanked.

Professionals Need to Be Informed

In order to effectively communicate a "Never spank" message, professionals who advise parents must themselves be informed about the research evidence and its implications. The key points to cover are the research evidence that:

- All methods of correction and control have a high failure rate with toddlers. Therefore, noncorporal discipline strategies will be experienced as "not working."
- CP is not more effective than other modes of correction and control.
- CP has harmful side effects.

This evidence makes it necessary to advise parents to never, ever, under any circumstance, hit a child. Professionals need be informed about the research evidence that makes it necessary to unambiguously advise parents to never spank. The success of the never-spank approach in Sweden has shown that such an approach is not only necessary in principle but that it has been very effective.

Since the passage of the no-spanking law and the steps to inform every parent, *and every child*, in Sweden that CP is wrong and is contrary to national policy, use of CP has decreased from rates that were about the same those as in the United States to a small minority of parents. So have the rates of crime, drug abuse, and suicide by youth decreased (Durrant, 1999). The Swedish experience shows that an absolute never-spank approach has worked to reduce use of CP. It has also shown that the disaster foreseen by the critics of the Swedish law—that without the ability to spank “when necessary,” parents would lose control and Sweden would become a nation of kids running wild—has not occurred.

Once child psychologists, pediatricians, and other professionals have been informed about the research and accept the implication that parents must be advised to never spank (as compared to advising parents to “avoid it if you can”), the key steps are relatively inexpensive, and given a desire to do so, relatively easy to implement. Some examples of these steps:

- Parent education programs, such as STEP, which are now silent on spanking, can be revised to include the evidence that spanking does *not* work better than other disciplinary tactics, even in the short run; and specifically to say “*Never spank.*”
- The Public Health Service can follow the Swedish model and sponsor no-spanking public service announcements on TV and on milk cartons.
- A “Never Spank” poster and pamphlets can be displayed in pediatrician’s offices and hospital maternity departments.
- A warning notice can be put on birth certificates such as:

WARNING: SPANKING HAS BEEN DETERMINED TO BE DANGEROUS TO THE HEALTH AND WELL-BEING OF YOUR CHILD—DO NOT EVER, UNDER ANY CIRCUMSTANCES, SPANK OR HIT YOUR CHILD.

The research cited in this chapter shows that there are many harmful effects of CP and many benefits of avoiding CP, but they are virtually impossible for parents to perceive by observing their children. The situation with spanking is parallel to that of smoking. Smokers in the past could perceive the short-run satisfaction from a cigarette, but had no way to see the adverse health consequences down the road until they were informed about the research. Similarly, parents can perceive the beneficial effects of a slap. However, it is difficult for them to perceive the equal effectiveness and equal short-term failure rate of alternatives. Most important, like smokers, they have no way of looking a year or more into the future to see if there is a harmful side effect of having hit their child to correct misbehavior. The only way parents can know this is through a major effort to inform all parents about the scientific evidence emphasizing two key points:

1. Spanking increases the risk of many behavior problems that parents want their children to avoid.
2. There is no need to put a child at risk for these problems because other methods of discipline are just as effective in the short run and more effective in the long run.

The Ethics of Advising Parents Never to Spank

Some defenders of CP argue that it is unethical to advise parents to never spank until there is absolutely conclusive evidence on the two key issues just mentioned (Larzelere, Baumrind, & Polite, 1998). The evidence from the experimental and prospective studies summarized in this book, although extremely strong, is not absolutely conclusive. Nevertheless, it *requires* informing and advising parents to never spank. For example, imagine a drug for which there is evidence of harmful side effects, but not conclusive evidence. Imagine that a new drug becomes available that is equally effective and that is known not to have the side effects of the old drug. A pediatrician would ordinarily advise parents to change to the new drug. CP is like the old drug. Alternative modes of correction and control are like the new drug. Consequently, the abundance of evidence indicating that CP has many harmful side effects, in combination with the evidence that other discipline responses are just as effective or more effective, creates an ethical *requirement* to advise parents to “switch to the new drug”—to never spank.

● JOHN ROSEMOND'S GIFT
TO THE EFFORT TO END SPANKING

Rosemond's chapter (this volume) begins by condemning "the separation of sex from reproduction" and by condemning "the movement of women into the workforce." This is a worldview that denies a central aspect of human expression (sexuality) and that denies half of humanity the right to choose their occupations. It is therefore not surprising that Rosemond also denies children the right to be free of physical attacks by their parents.

Perhaps one reason Rosemond can hold such a fossilized worldview, is that, despite academic credentials, he pays no attention to scientific evidence and does not even bother to check out ordinary facts. For example, he says that Child Protective Services is a "Spanking Gestapo" and disregards "parental discretion in matters of discipline." On the contrary, the child abuse statutes of almost all states make a clear distinction between spanking and child abuse. Ironically, these "child protection" laws actually reinforce the right of parents to hit children because they include a disclaimer that says that the statute should not be construed as prohibiting or interfering with the right of parents to spank. In addition, the criminal laws of every state of the United States exempt parents from prosecution for the crime of assault if they use "reasonable force" in the form of spanking. Because of these legal directives and because they are typically understaffed, Child Protective Services will not even investigate reports about spanking unless it is "extreme," unless there are indications that it is malicious rather than disciplinary, or unless the child is injured.

In addition to Rosemond's fossilized worldview and his ignoring of both scientific evidence and the law of his own and every other U.S. state, there are the deceptions. Rosemond says, "Let me make perfectly clear that I do not 'believe' in spankings," but then he proceeds to advocate spanking. For example, he says that other modes of discipline are not as effective as spanking, and that "because it is in the best interests of the child and society that the misbehavior in question be deterred as effectively as possible, the child's parents would do well to spank." My interpretation of these contradictory statements is that the "I don't believe in spankings" preface was to ease the concerns of readers who are uneasy about spanking. Then, when their concern has been neutralized, the real message—that spanking is sometimes necessary—is presented. This may be good rhetoric, but it is bad science because it

ignores the research showing that other modes of discipline are just as effective as spanking in the short run and more effective in the long run. Moreover, there is a great deal of other research showing that in the long run, spanking is *less* effective or counterproductive.

Rosemond's chapter may set a record for false statements, deceptions, and contradictions per page. Here are some of the others:

- "Most baby boomers were spanked. Few now are anything other than law-abiding citizens." While correct, it does not show that spanking is harmless, just as the fact that two-thirds of heavy smokers do *not* die of a smoking-related disease (Mattson, Pollack, & Cullen, 1987) does not show that smoking is harmless.
- "Violent discipline, as dispensed by parents who do not love their children powerfully, inclines a child toward either violence or depression." At least in this sentence when Rosemond refers to spanking as "violent discipline" he is calling a spade a spade. But the sentence also falsely implies that, if parents "love their children powerfully," spanking will not increase the probability of the child being violent. There have been many studies that controlled for parental warmth and love and still found that spanking is related to violence by the children and also later as adults.
- "In Sweden . . . the problem of child abuse . . . significantly worsened since passage of [the no-spanking law]." The research shows just the opposite. Joan Durrant (1999), who has studied the Swedish law and its effects in detail, found that Sweden has *not* become a nation of kids running wild. In fact, the rates of juvenile crime, drug and alcohol use, and suicide have all *decreased* (Durrant, 2000). There is no way of knowing if these improvements in the well-being of Swedish youth occurred because of the decrease in spanking. However, it can be said with certainty that ending spanking has not had the dire consequences for children feared by opponents of the no-spanking law. In addition, it can also be said with certainty that no one has gone to jail or been fined for spanking, because the Swedish law is entirely for purposes of education and helping parents. It contains no provisions for penalties.
- John Rosemond's chapter is guided by a view of human life and family relations that is so unrealistic and inhumane, and is

so full of errors, contradictions, and deceptions, that it will probably make an unintended contribution to the effort to end what Rosemond himself calls "violent discipline."

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