

5.13.1: "Spare the Rod, Spoil the Child" Myth/Controversy

This unit delved into theories of criminal behavior, and the previous unit sought crime control policies. Each theory suggests an appropriate means to reduce or prevent violence. Some work and some do not. Deterrence theories operate on the assumption that people want to minimize pain. Learning theories suggest people may learn how to be a criminal (or learn how not to be a criminal). Disciplining children is a primary function of the family. Many people believe it is acceptable, or even necessary, to spank their children. Spanking is a form of corporal punishment. Why do parents spank their children? For some parents, they spank as a form of punishment (Remember operant conditioning? It is a form of positive punishment). They are using physical means to stop a behavior from happening again. These are ideological beliefs.

Other parents might say that they've been spanked as a child, and they turned out fine. This belief reinforces the family upbringing myth. Additionally, other parents might feel pressure to discipline their child with physical force. Some parents "think" they seem "weak" if they do not spank their child. Furthermore, grandparents and other family members might encourage new parents to spank their children.

Please listen or read the National Public Radio's podcast on spanking ([NPR's – "The American Academy of Pediatrics On Spanking Children: Don't Do It, Ever."](#))

There is a difference between physical discipline and physical abuse, but it is a fine line. If you are in favor of spanking, would you let another family member spank your child? Would you let a stranger? Why or why not? It is not illegal to spank children in the United States, but decades of research have recommended other methods of punishment and discipline besides physical force. At the very least, it is easy for children to learn that violence (spanking) is an appropriate method to get what you want. Parents who spank their children because their child "hit" another child or sibling might want to reflect on a child may learn – "I'm going to hit (spank) you for hitting another person. Don't hit!"

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