To Spank or Not to Spank?

Experts say not to. So what do they do?

May 25, 2007 By Nicole Joseph

For many in our community, “smacking someone upside the head” is the way to get kids in line and keep their respect. But child experts now warn that spanking can be emotionally damaging, lead children to think it’s OK to hit when they’re upset, and encourage them to hide bad behaviors rather than change them. Recently, a California legislator even tried to outlaw spanking. What disciplinary techniques do child behavior experts use with their own kids? *Real Health* found out.

LOOK FOR WHAT MOTIVATES THEM

“When my oldest son was 4 or 5 years old, he hit his teacher at day care. When I got there, I asked him, ‘Do you want your teachers to think that you don’t have a good mommy?’ The tears started coming down—I knew I’d hit a trigger point. You have to be in tune with your children and know what pushes their buttons!”

—Dr. Rhonda Wells-Wilbon, social work professor, Baltimore; mother of two sons, ages 9 and 11

GIVE A CHILD OPTIONS

“One thing that works well is to give a child a choice between two things she can do. If it’s bedtime and she doesn’t want to go, ask her if she wants to hop to bed, or if she wants to skip there. She will focus on the lesser of the two evils.”

—Janice Cawthorn, director, Hampton University’s Child Development Center, Hampton, VA; grandmother of 12

OTHER TIME-TESTED TRICKS

Timeouts Have younger children sit quietly, calm down and think about what they did—and why they shouldn’t repeat it.

Rewards A reward, including verbal praise, lets children know that their good behavior is acknowledged and appreciated.

Taking away privileges Kids may avoid misbehaving if they think they’ll lose their favorite privilege, such as Saturday morning cartoons. But parents should explain their reasons.

Natural consequences Letting older children or preteens fail sometimes (within safe boundaries) can help them grow up and make healthy decisions on their own.

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