

## Reasons to Not Hit Your Kids

By Jan Hunt

**T**he practice hitting children teaches them to become hitters themselves. Extensive research data is now available to support the direct correlation between corporal punishment in childhood and violent behavior in the teenage and adult years. Virtually all of the most dangerous criminals were regularly threatened and punished in childhood.

**P**unishment gives the message that "might makes right," that it is okay to hurt someone smaller and less powerful than you are. The child then feels it is appropriate to mistreat younger or smaller children, and when he becomes an adult, feels little compassion for those less fortunate or powerful than he is, and fears those who are more so. Thus it is difficult for him to find meaningful friendships.

**C**hildren learn best through parental modeling. Punishment gives the message that hitting is an appropriate way to express one's feelings and to solve problems. If the child rarely sees the parent handle anger and solve problems in a creative and positive way, he can never learn how to do that himself. Thus inadequate parenting continues into the next generation.

**T**he oft-quoted "spare the rod and spoil the child" is in fact a misinterpretation of biblical teaching. Although the rod is mentioned many times in the Bible, it is only in the Book of Proverbs (the words of King Solomon) that it is used in connection with child rearing. Solomon's methods worked very badly for his own son, Prince Rehoboam. In the Bible, there is not support for hitting children outside of Solomon's Proverbs. Jesus saw children as being close to God and urged love, not punishment.

**P**unishment greatly interferes with the bond between parent and child, as no human being feels loving toward someone who deliberately hurts him. The true cooperative behavior the parent desires can only be accomplished through a strong bond based on loving feelings, and through many examples

of kindness and cooperative skills. Punishment, even when it appears to work, can produce only superficially "good" behavior based on fear.

**A**nger which cannot be safely expressed becomes stored inside: angry teenagers do not fall from the sky. Anger that has accumulated for many years can come as a shock for parents whose child now feels strong enough to express his rage. Thus punishment may produce "good" behavior in the early years, though at a high price, paid by the parent and society, during adolescence and adulthood.

**S**panking can be physically damaging. Blows to the low end of the spinal column send shock waves the length of the column, and may cause subdural hematoma. The prevalence of lower back pain among adults may have its origins in early corporal punishment. Paralysis has occurred through nerve damage, and children have died after relatively mild paddlings, due to undiagnosed medical problems. Many parents are unaware of alternative approaches to try, so when punishment doesn't accomplish the parent's goals, it escalates, easily crossing the line into child abuse.

**I**n many, if not most cases of "bad behavior," the child is responding to neglect of basic needs: proper sleep and nutrition, treatment of hidden allergies, fresh air, exercise, freedom to explore the world around him, etc. His greatest need is for his parents' undivided attention. . . Punishing a child for responding in a natural way to having important needs neglected is really unfair.

**P**erhaps the most important problem with punishment is that it distracts the child from the problem at hand, as he becomes preoccupied with feelings of anger and revenge. In this way the child is deprived of the best opportunities for learning creative problem-solving, and the parent is deprived of the best opportunities for letting the child learn moral values as they relate to real situations.