

# **Corporal Punishment**

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#### **Definitions:**

Corporal punishment is the use of physical force with the intention of causing a child to experience pain, but not injury, for the purpose of correction or control of the child's behavior.

In corporal punishment, an adult usually hits various parts of the child's body with a hand, or with canes, paddles, yardsticks, belts, or other objects expected to cause pain and fear.

Spanking is a form of corporal punishment intended to modify behavior usually defined as a physically non-injurious hit administered with an open hand to the buttocks.

#### **Background:**

Corporal punishment has been a common practice in many societies both as a method of child rearing and a punishment in the administration of justice in legal systems. Many societies have now outlawed this behavior as components of their justice systems and the use of force between adults is usually classified as assault. Some societies have outlawed the use of corporal punishment on children. Canada has not taken this stance respecting children.

## **Research:**

While the intent of corporal punishment is to correct or control the child's behavior, as with any methodology of behavioral management, it should be examined for effectiveness and side effects.

There are now a number of large scale retrospective and prospective studies on corporal punishment, mostly in the United States but some in Canada and other countries. A number of these studies (but not all) have demonstrated some effectiveness in gaining immediate compliance. At the same time, these same studies and others have demonstrated that the use of corporal punishment is directly and proportionately associated with increased rates of the following, by adulthood:

- impaired parent child relationship (fear, anxiety, anger, avoidance)
- juvenile delinquency
- student violence and murder rates in schools in which teachers are allowed to hit children
- reduced chance of entering higher income categories
- difficulties internalizing moral behavior
- feelings of alienation as an adult.
- depression
- thinking about and acts of suicide
- becoming a victim of physical abuse
- physical abuse of one's own children later in life
- spousal assault and other acts of assault
- masochistic sexual behaviour

There are now studies that show that even one or two instances of corporal punishment are associated with a slightly higher probability of later physically abusing your own child, slightly more depressive symptoms, and a greater probability of violence and other crime later in life.

Numerous studies of child behavior have also demonstrated a number of methods (see appendix) of gaining compliance in the raising of children. There is no evidence that corporal punishment is more effective than other forms of discipline in the short run, and there is much evidence that it is less effective in the long run.

On an individual basis, corporal punishment signals to the child that a way to settle interpersonal conflicts is to use physical force and inflict pain. Such children may in turn resort to such behavior themselves. They may also fail to develop trusting, secure relationships with adults and fail to evolve the necessary skills to settle disputes or wield authority in less violent ways. Supervising adults who willfully humiliate children and punish by force and pain are often causing more harm than they prevent.

At the board meeting of 2005-04-09, the Board of Directors passed the following Policy Statement.

## **Policy Statement:**

It is as a result of this evidence that the Canadian Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry makes the following policy statement:

- The Canadian Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry recommends against the use of corporal punishment in the raising of children.
- The Canadian Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry supports the provision of timely and appropriate assistance through voluntary or legislated means to the families, care givers and their children in which corporal punishment has been used.
- The Canadian Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry support the final recommendations of the Coalition on the Physical Punishment of Children and Youth and its [Joint Statement on Physical Punishment of Children and Youth](#) .

## **Summary of Recommendations in Executive Summary :**

Recommendations for action in Canada include: (1) delivery of public awareness messages to inform all Canadians that physical punishment is harmful to children's development and is ineffective as discipline; (2) development of universal parenting education; and (3) provision of the same protection of children from physical assault as is given to Canadian adults and to children in a growing number of countries.

Responsibility for action lies within the jurisdiction of national, provincial and territorial and local levels of government, the mandates of organizations and the expertise of professionals who serve children and youth. The statement as a whole may be considered an urge to action by parents and caregivers—within and beyond their families.

## **The specific recommendations in the document are as follows:**

It is as a result of this evidence that the Canadian Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry makes the following policy statement:

1. The Canadian Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry recommends against the use of corporal punishment in the raising of children.
2. The Canadian Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry supports the provision of timely and appropriate assistance through voluntary or legislated means to the families, care givers and their children in which corporal punishment has been used.
3. The Canadian Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry support the final recommendations of the Coalition on the Physical Punishment of Children and Youth and its *Joint Statement on Physical Punishment of Children and Youth* .
  - 3.1 Child- and family-serving organizations should develop and proclaim clear positions regarding physical punishment.

3.2 Professionals should help parents and caregivers understand the risks of physical punishment and assist them in replacing its use with effective disciplinary strategies.

3.3 Professional training should include information about children's physical, psychological and social development, risk factors for and of physical punishment, and effective methods of guiding and socializing children.

- Child welfare eligibility and investigative protocols must be reviewed and sufficiently resourced to ensure that they facilitate early supportive/preventive intervention and services.

4.1 Intervention should be proactive and educational and begin earlier in the violence escalation cycle.

4.2 An aim of early intervention should be to build parenting competence to reduce the need for removal of children from their families and for criminal prosecution of parents.

- The physical punishment of children can no longer be justified by the Criminal Code of Canada.

5.1 children in Canada must be given the same protection from physical assault as that given to Canadian adults and to children in a growing number of countries. Our children's rights to physical integrity and dignity must be recognized in our law.

5.2 Canadian laws must be consistent in communicating a clear standard of caregiving, and consistent with Canada's 1991 ratification of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child.

5.3 The law should not contradict the growing and persuasive body of research evidence that physical punishment has no benefit and poses only risk to children and youth. The effectiveness of public education messages to this effect will be limited as long as they are undermined by the Criminal Code.

- Reliable baseline and ongoing data should be collected at the national level on Canadians' attitudes toward and use of physical punishment, so that the impact of public awareness and education strategies can be assessed. This too should be a shared responsibility of the national, provincial and territorial governments.

### **Bibliography:**

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## **APPENDIX**