

# PLAIN TALK ABOUT SPANKING

By Jordan Riak

**2011 EDITION**

Parents and Teachers Against Violence in Education

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By Jordan Riak

*Dedicated to the Memory of Alice Miller  
1923-2010*

**Parents and Teachers Against Violence in Education** (PTAVE) offers this publication for the benefit of children everywhere. The ideas that you will read here are not new. There have always been wise and perceptive people in every civilized culture who practiced and advocated violence-free interactions with children. But, for the most part, their good example and good advice have been ignored or rejected, and the consequences to humanity have been incalculable. In these few pages we have attempted to summarize their message and offer it once again.

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### *Praise for this publication*

- “Thank you so much for your clear, true, brave and convincing booklet. It should be offered free to every parent immediately after the birth of EACH of their children.” — Alice Miller, Ph.D., psychotherapist and internationally renowned author of (among other books) the best-selling *For Your Own Good: Hidden cruelty in child-rearing and the roots of violence*.

- “This is the most articulately written argument against spanking I have ever seen. If every pediatrician in this country gives this booklet to their patients’ parents on the first visit and recommends a short discussion on the second visit, we will have a reduction in child abuse.” — Katharine Bensinger, M.S., LCPC, Program Director, Parenting Education Program, Community Counseling Centers of Chicago.

- “‘Plain Talk’ is my #1 tool in helping parents make the decision to stop spanking. I can’t tell you how many have come in after reading it and said, ‘I’ll never spank my child (children) again!’ ” — Janis Christenson, Ph.D., Clinical Psychologist, Nashville, Tennessee.

- “I want to let you know how much I appreciate ‘Plain Talk About Spanking.’ In my job as the Early Childhood Specialist in our child-serving community mental health agency, I find it particularly important to have adults make conscious choices about the best way to provide guidance for children. Your booklet is offered to those attending my speaking engagements, enrolled in our parenting classes, and professionals who have contact with me.” — Lynn McCasland, Early Childhood Specialist, Family Resource Centers, Findlay, Ohio.

- “I have made ‘Plain Talk About Spanking’ required reading for my parenting classes at the University of Hawaii and for parents at our Family Education Training Center. Thank you for helping me teach that discipline and spanking are not the same. As an Adlerian family counselor, your booklet is congruent with my professional and personal beliefs. Both of my now grown children were successfully parented without ever being spanked.” — James A. Deutch, DSW, LCSW. Lecturer, Family and Consumer Sciences, University of Hawaii. Past President, Family Education Centers of Hawaii.

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## HOW YOU CAN MAKE A DIFFERENCE

There are people in your community who have never heard the ideas expressed in this publication. It's time they heard, don't you agree?

We invite you to become an active partner in our campaign to spread the word that a safe, sane, nonviolent world begins at home, one child at a time. The evidence is clear: gentle, patient, caring treatment of children during their formative years is the "magic pill" that puts them on the right path for a lifetime. Since children behave as well as they are treated and learn from example, we have a duty to expose them to the best treatment and the best examples. They in turn will perpetuate that standard with their own children, and so on into future generations. It's that simple.

Many people initially respond to the evidence against spanking with skepticism. Some reject it outright. Some refuse to think about it or may even become annoyed or hostile because this information can awaken repressed feelings. Don't let that discourage you. There are others who want to know why the old familiar method for socializing children works so poorly. And there are those who already are raising their children without violence but need reassurance that they are on the right track.

We are confident that some day soon civilized humanity will look back with astonishment and pity at the time when people believed hitting children was good for them.

As this booklet goes to press, there are 31 nations that have modernized their laws so that protection against assault and battery applies to all persons irrespective of age. They have wisely closed spankers' legal loophole. Listed with their respective dates of reform, they are: Sweden - 1979, Finland - 1983, Norway - 1987, Austria - 1989, Cyprus - 1994, Italy - 1996, Denmark - 1997, Latvia - 1998, Croatia - 1999, Bulgaria - 2000, Germany - 2000, Israel - 2000, Iceland - 2003, Ukraine - 2004, Romania - 2004, Hungary - 2005, Greece - 2006, Netherlands - 2007, New Zealand - 2007, Portugal - 2007, Uruguay - 2007, Venezuela - 2007, Chile - 2007, Spain - 2007, Costa Rica - 2008, Republic of Moldova - 2009, Luxembourg - 2009, Liechtenstein - 2010, Tunisia - 2010, Poland - 2010, Kenya - 2010, *and counting!*

### RECOMMENDED FURTHER STUDY

Visit PTAVE's Web site, "Project NoSpank" at [www.nospank.net](http://www.nospank.net). There, you'll find scholarly works that constitute the bibliography for this booklet and a vast collection of related articles, letters and book excerpts. Especially see Alice Miller's *For Your Own Good: Hidden cruelty in child-rearing and the roots of violence* at [www.nospank.net/fyog.htm](http://www.nospank.net/fyog.htm).



Criticism of traditional parenting methods is typically met with suspicion, resistance, and hostility. Were this fundamental conservatism of human nature to express itself in words, it might say something like this:

*If the old methods worked well enough for past generations, they'll surely work for the next. Don't fix it if it isn't broken. Don't mess with success. Sometimes children just need a good smack on the bottom to get their attention. It never did a child any harm. That's how I was raised, and I turned out okay.*

But just how well did we really turn out? Sooner or later we have to admit that perhaps not all family traditions are created equal. Maybe in some cases, they've made our lives more precarious and unhappy than they need to have been. And maybe— just *maybe* — we haven't turned out quite as "okay" as we would like to believe and have others believe.

When we praise our parents' treatment of us when we were little, are we merely fishing for approval of our own similar behaviors now? Are we trying to reassure ourselves that the way we like to remember things is the way they really were and ought to remain?

Let's test the I-turned-out-okay argument by examining a few real-life examples from my own childhood. See if they apply to you.

1) There were ashtrays in every room of our house. My parents smoked, as did most adult visitors to our home. The aroma of cigarette, cigar and pipe smoke was always present. Nobody minded. In fact, not one day passed in my early life when I was not exposed to tobacco smoke. I was even exposed in the womb because my mother smoked when she was pregnant with me. *And I turned out okay.*

2) The first family car I remember was a 1937 Chevrolet sedan. It had no seat belts. When we traveled, I was merely plunked down on the back seat with the expectation that gravity would keep me there. It did. *And I turned out okay.*

3) All the places in which I lived as a child were painted with lead-based paint. *And I turned out okay.*

4) I used a bicycle throughout my childhood and teen years, but I never wore any kind of protective headgear. *And I turned out okay.*

Was my family wise or just lucky? Today, we don't do those things anymore. We don't take such risks, and we don't expose our children to such risks – not if we know the facts.

## SPANKING – The Facts

### The lasting effect

Current research in the fields of mental health and child development supports the theory that acts of violence against a child, no matter how brief or how mild, are like exposing the child to a toxin. Repeated exposure has a cumulative and enduring effect. We can demonstrate this from personal experience. Most of us would have to admit that the most vivid and unpleasant childhood memories are those of being mistreated by our parents. Some people find the memory of such events so disturbing they pretend that they were trivial, even funny. You'll notice them smiling as they describe how they were punished. It is shame, not pleasure, that makes them smile. As a protection against present pain, they disguise the memory of past feelings.

Some parents, eager to justify their behavior, will argue: "You have a duty to grab a child who is about to do something dangerous – to touch the hot stove or run into a busy street – and deliver a good smack so that your warnings about life's dangers will be remembered." Were that argument valid, spankings would become increasingly infrequent as children learned their lessons. But that's not what usually happens. Spankings tend to escalate in frequency and

"It is a disgusting and slavish treatment... When children are beaten, pain or fear frequently have the result of which it is not pleasant to speak and which are likely subsequently to be a source of shame, shame which unnerves and depresses the mind and leads the child to shun the light of day and loathe the light. . . I will spend no longer time on this matter. We know enough about it already."

**Quintilian**, circa 90 CE, *Institutes of Oratory*, Ancient Rome.

## QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

**Q:** What do virtually all juvenile delinquents have in common?

**A:** They have been raised by spankers.

**Q:** What was a common feature of the childhoods of Hitler, Stalin, Pol Pot, Saddam Hussein and Charles Manson?

**A:** Each one was relentlessly, severely, physically punished.

**Q:** What do most prisoners on death row have in common?

**A:** Plenty of spankings during childhood.

**Q:** What do rapists, arsonists, terrorists, torturers, serial killers, mass murderers, suicide bombers, kidnappers, snipers, assassins, muggers, vandals, spouse batterers and stalkers have in common?

**A:** Violent upbringing.

**Q:** Which child is destined never to join the company of felons?

**A:** One who is raised in a nurturing, attentive, supportive, non-spanking family.

**Q:** To turn a friendly puppy into a vicious guard dog, what must you do to it?

**A:** Restrict its movement and beat it often.

“Researchers have also found that children who are spanked show higher rates of aggression and delinquency in childhood than those who were not spanked. As adults, they are more prone to depression, feelings of alienation, use of violence toward a spouse, and lower economic and professional achievement. None of this is what we want for our children.”

**Alvin Poussaint**, M.D., Professor of Psychiatry, Harvard Medical School, 1999. See [www.nospank.net/psnt.htm](http://www.nospank.net/psnt.htm)

“Infliction of pain or discomfort, however minor, is not a desirable method of communicating with children.”

**American Medical Association**, House of Delegates, 1985.

“As long as the child will be trained not by love, but by fear, so long will humanity live not by justice, but by force. As long as the child will be ruled by the educator’s threat and by the father’s rod, so long will mankind be dominated by the policeman’s club, by fear of jail, and by panic of invasion by armies and navies.”

**Boris Sidis**, Ph.D., M.D., from “A lecture on the abuse of the fear instinct in early education” in *Journal of Abnormal Psychology*, 1919. See [www.nospank.net/sidis.htm](http://www.nospank.net/sidis.htm)

“Slavish discipline makes a slavish temper. . . Beating them, and all other sorts of slavish and corporal punishments, are not the discipline fit to be used in the education of those we would have wise, good, and ingenuous men.”

**John Locke**, “Some Thoughts Concerning Education,” 1692.

“Chide not the pupil hastily, for that will both dull his wit and discourage his diligence, but [ad]monish him gently, which shall make him both willing to amend and glad to go forward in love and hope of learning... Let the master say, ‘Here ye do well.’ For I assure you there is no such whetstone to sharpen a good wit and encourage a love of learning as his praise... In mine opinion, love is fitter than fear, gentleness better than beating, to bring up a child rightly in learning.”

**Roger Ascham**, Tutor to Queen Elizabeth I, from *The Scholemaster*, published 1570.

“Children ought to be led to honorable practices by means of encouragement and reasoning, and most certainly not by blows and ill treatment.”

**Plutarch**, circa 45–120 CE, “The Education of Children,” Vol. I, *Moralia*, Ancient Greece.

severity as children grow, and spanked children tend to behave worse. In fact, being spanked throws children into a state of powerful confusion, making it difficult for them to learn the lessons adults claim they were trying to teach. Parents who deliver the so-called “good smack” are not teaching their children that hot stoves and busy streets are dangerous. They are teaching them that the grownups upon whom they depend are dangerous. That’s a bad lesson.

### **Lost trust**

Survival is the newborn infant’s overriding concern. Fear of falling and of loud noises, like the need to suckle, are not learned responses. They come ready-made and fully functioning at birth. And beginning immediately after birth, the sound of the mother’s voice, the warmth and gentleness of her touch, the scent of her body, the taste of her milk – these key experiences inform the infant of its world and set the stage for all that follows. Trust is crucial and must be established early. Tragically for many, it is destroyed early. Neglect, rough handling, threats, shouts and associated harsh treatment including spanking, all of which begin earlier in children’s lives than anyone wants to admit, are the principal agents of that destruction.

Over the years, I’ve compiled a list of synonyms for spanking. That list continues to grow. I don’t think there is another act with as many names for it in the English language. The reason for this seems clear to me. People who hit children feel compelled to trivialize and minimize the act, even to the point of making it seem comical. To this end, they have created a special language for the subject. They improvise endlessly on that language as if it were possible to sweeten violence toward children merely by inventing new, colorful, funny-sounding names for it.

Meanwhile, what’s happening to the unseen, internal life of the child? The spanked child, like one who is denied adequate food, warmth or rest, is less able to regard the parent as a source of love and security. The parent-child relationship is inevitably soured by this betrayal, and consequently the child fails to mature and thrive in the best possible way.

When trust between children and their closest caretakers is damaged, the children’s ability to form trusting relationships with others is also damaged, and the effect may be lifelong. People who have been harmed this way tend to see all relationships as negotiations, as deals to be won or lost. They are always on guard. They see honesty and trustfulness in others as weaknesses to be exploited, exactly as it was once done to them. They tend to see the world as an extension of their early home life — a dangerous environment in which the best protection against being a victim is to become a victimizer.

### **Neglect and permissiveness**

Defenders of spanking often argue that a caretaker's only choice is between spanking and doing nothing. That's a false choice. Permissiveness is as unwise and counterproductive as hitting. The wise caretaker establishes a safe environment with age-appropriate boundaries and reasonable rules, models called-for behaviors, and appeals to and cultivates the child's natural inclination toward imitation and cooperation. This method takes more skill and patience than hitting, but it works. It strengthens the bond of trust between parent and child, between teacher and learner, thus paving the way for the many challenging lessons ahead.

### **Spousal battery and spanking**

In the overwhelming majority of cases, husbands and wives whose relationships include violence are also violent toward their children. Such people surely were spanked when they were little and likely witnessed others being spanked.

Battering and battered spouses who spank their children are raising them to become batterers and victims exactly like themselves. The children learn from the parents' example that the way to vent frustration, express disapproval and assert authority is by hitting someone smaller and weaker than themselves. They see this principle demonstrated every time they witness their parents come to blows, as well as every time they are on the receiving end of violent punishments. They learn that once they are big enough and strong enough, they can control others by threatening or hurting them. They learn that it is okay for husbands and wives to mistreat each other and for adults to mistreat children.

When children, whose personalities have been formed in violent households, grow up and have children of their own, they find it very difficult to break free from the behaviors they have witnessed and experienced. The skills they apply to family life will be the poor ones they learned from their parents, and they are likely to perpetuate the cycle of abuse through their own innocent children.

As spanking disappears from family life, other forms of domestic violence will also disappear.

### **Escalation**

Physical injuries and deaths of children caused by their caretakers often are the consequence of physical punishment. Perpetrators of even the most horrendous acts against children typically explain that the child's misbehavior called for punishment, and the outcome was unintended. "Accidental" is the child abuser's all-weather alibi.

standard ethics for certain sets of people?"

**Adah Maurer**, "Psychodynamics of the Punisher," Watman Educational Services, 1974. See [www.nospank.net/maurer2.htm](http://www.nospank.net/maurer2.htm).

"Punitive measures whether administered by police, teachers, spouses or parents have well-known standard effects: (1) escape—education has its own name for that: truancy, (2) counterattack—vandalism on schools and attacks on teachers, (3) apathy—a sullen do-nothing withdrawal. The more violent the punishment, the more serious the by-products."

**B. F. Skinner**, Ph.D., author, Professor of Psychology, Harvard  
Excerpt from personal communication, 1983.

"Corporal punishment trains children to accept and tolerate aggression. It always figures prominently in the roots of adolescent and adult aggressiveness, especially in those manifestations that take an antisocial form such as delinquency and criminality."

**Philip Greven**, Professor of History, Rutgers University. Excerpt from *Spare the Child: The Religious Roots of Punishment and the Psychological Impact of Physical Abuse*, 1990. (p.193) See [www.nospank.net/greven.htm](http://www.nospank.net/greven.htm).

"I have always been an advocate for the total abolition of corporal punishment and I believe the connection with pornography that is so oriented has its roots in our tradition of beating children."

**Gordon Moyes**, D. D., Pastor, Uniting Church, Superintendent of the Wesley Central Mission, Sydney, Australia. Excerpt from personal communication, 1980.

"The much-touted 'biblical argument' in support of corporal punishment is founded upon *proof-texting* a few isolated passages from Proverbs. Using the same method of selective scripture reading, one could also cite the Bible as an authority for the practice of slavery, adultery, polygamy, incest, suppression of women, executing people who eat pork, and infanticide. The brutal and vindictive practice of corporal punishment cannot be reconciled with the major New Testament themes that teach love and forgiveness and a respect for the sacredness and dignity of children—and which overwhelmingly reject violence and retribution as a means of solving human problems. Would Jesus ever hit a child? NEVER!"

**The Rev. Thomas E. Sagendorf**, United Methodist Clergy (Retired), Hamilton, Indiana. Personal communication, 2006.

**Paulo Sergio Pinheiro**, Member of the UN Sub-commission on the promotion and protection of human rights, Geneva, 2006.

“I have never accepted the principle of ‘spare the rod and spoil the child.’ ...I am persuaded that violent fathers produce violent sons... Children don’t need beating. They need love and encouragement. They need fathers to whom they can look with respect rather than fear. Above all, they need example.”

**Gordon B. Hinckley**, President, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, October 1994 General Conference.

“Any form of corporal punishment or ‘spanking’ is a violent attack upon another human being’s integrity. The effect remains with the victim forever and becomes an unforgiving part of his or her personality — a massive frustration resulting in a hostility which will seek expression in later life in violent acts towards others. The sooner we understand that love and gentleness are the only kinds of called-for behavior towards children, the better. The child, especially, learns to become the kind of human being that he or she has experienced. This should be fully understood by all caregivers.”

**Ashley Montagu**, Anthropologist, 1989. Excerpt from personal communication. See [www.nospank.net/montagu.htm](http://www.nospank.net/montagu.htm).

“Corporal punishment of children actually interferes with the process of learning and with their optimal development as socially responsible adults. We feel it is important for public health workers, teachers and others concerned for the emotional and physical health of children and youth to support the adoption of alternative methods for the achievement of self-control and responsible behavior in children and adolescents.”

**Daniel F. Whiteside**, D.D.S., Assistant Surgeon General, Department of Health & Human Services, Administration of President Ronald Reagan, 1990. Excerpt from personal communication.

“When our Founding Fathers wrote into the basic law of our land protection against cruel and unusual punishment for everyone including dissenters and criminals, they had not been convinced by evidence, scientific or otherwise, that such punishments do not work. They added the amendment because of ethical considerations. They prized the climate of freedom more than the security of governing a populace forcibly of one mind. Over the years these proud hopes have slowly approached reality. Except for children. Which brings us back to our original question: How does it become possible to bypass

Many infants’ and toddlers’ deaths attributed to accidents such as falling out of the crib, falling down the stairs, or accidentally drowning in the bathtub because the parent was distracted by a telephone call, would be reclassified as homicides if the truth were known. Sometimes the victim is blamed for his own misfortune, for example: “he bruises easily,” “has soft bones,” “is accident prone,” “she brought it on herself,” or “wouldn’t hold still.”

Some defenders of spanking caution that spanking, to be done correctly, must be done methodically and with deliberation. “Never spank in anger,” they say. The implicit message here is that it’s quite all right to hurt another person on condition that one does it calmly. (Sadists enthusiastically endorse this formula.) But it is highly unlikely that anyone being abused — child or adult — notices or cares about their abuser’s frame of mind.

Many spankers are habituated to the practice because it provides them with an instant outlet for their feelings of frustration and anger — not because they’ve found it an effective way to improve a child’s behavior. And because acts of violence, by their very nature, tend to escalate as they are indulged, there is no safe way to hit a child.

### **Spanking and sexual molestation**

Spanked children learn that their bodies are not their personal property. Spanking teaches them that even their sexual areas are subject to the will of adults. The child who submits to a spanking on Monday is not likely to say no to a molester on Tuesday. It’s time spankers realized that – no matter what else they think they are accomplishing – they are setting children up to be easy prey for predators.

### **Spanking the buttocks and sexual development**

Medical science has long recognized and documented in great detail how being struck on the buttocks can stimulate sexual feelings. Children are especially susceptible. The tragic consequence for many children who have been punished by spanking is that they form a connection between pain, humiliation and sexual arousal that endures for the rest of their lives. In *Slaughter of the Innocents*, David Bakan writes:

“. . . The buttocks are the locus for the induction of pain in a child. We are familiar with the argument that it is a safe ‘locus’ for spanking. However, the anal region is also the major erotic region at precisely the time the child is likely to be beaten there. Thus it is aptly chosen to achieve the result of deranged sexuality in adulthood...” 1971 (p. 113).

The pornography and prostitution industries do a thriving business catering to the needs of countless unfortunate individuals whose sexual development has been derailed by childhood spankings. If we put all other considerations aside, this should be reason enough never to spank a child.

### **The physical dangers of hitting the buttocks**

Located deep in the buttocks is the sciatic nerve, the largest nerve in the body. A severe blow to the buttocks, particularly with a blunt instrument, could cause bleeding in the muscles that surround that nerve, possibly injuring it and causing impairment to the involved leg.

In addition to nerve damage and soft tissue damage, a blow to the buttocks can cause injury to the tailbone (coccyx) or sacrum. It sends force waves upward through the spinal column possibly causing disc compression or compression fractures of vertebral bones.

Some people, in their attempt to justify battering children's buttocks, claim that God or nature intended that part of the anatomy for spanking. That is a brazenly perverse claim. No part of the human body was made to be mistreated.

### **Physical danger of hitting the hands**

The child's hand is particularly vulnerable because its ligaments, nerves, tendons and blood vessels are close to the skin, which has no underlying protective tissue. Striking the hands of younger children is especially dangerous to the growth plates in the bones, which, if damaged, can cause deformity or impaired function. Striking a child's hand can also cause fractures, dislocations and lead to premature osteoarthritis.

### **Shaking**

Being shaken can cause a child blindness, whiplash, brain damage, spinal cord injury and even death.

### **Spanking at home, performance at school**

Perceptive teachers will tell you that the children who exhibit the most serious behavior problems at school also have the most troubled home environments. For many of these children, the battle zone which is their home life carries over into their school life. This sets them up for academic failure and dropout. In their attempt to erect a shield against what they see as a comfortless, hostile world, these children naturally seek the company of other children with similar problems. Street gangs evolve to fill the void left by failed home life and failed school life.

## **WHAT THE EXPERTS SAY**

“If we really want a peaceful and compassionate world, we need to build communities of trust where all children are respected, where home and school are safe places to be and where discipline is taught by example.”

**Desmond M. Tutu**, Archbishop Emeritus, Global Initiative to End All Corporal Punishment of Children, 2006.

See [www.nospank.net/globalreport.pdf](http://www.nospank.net/globalreport.pdf).

“The claim that mild punishment (slaps or smacks) have no detrimental effect is still widespread because we received this message very early from our parents who had taken it over from their parents. Unfortunately, the main damage it causes is precisely the broad dissemination of this conviction. The result is that each successive generation is subjected to the tragic effects of so-called ‘physical correction.’ . . . Physical cruelty and emotional humiliation not only leave their marks on children, they also inflict a disastrous imprint on the future of our society. Information on the effects of the “well-meant smack” should therefore be part and parcel of courses for expectant mothers and of counseling for parents.”

**Alice Miller**, Excerpt from: “Every Smack is a Humiliation,” 1998.

See [www.nospank.net/miller3.htm](http://www.nospank.net/miller3.htm).

“A society with little or no hitting of children is likely to result in fewer people who are alienated, depressed, or suicidal, and in fewer violent marriages. The potential benefits for the society as a whole are equally great. These include lower crime rates, especially for violent crimes; increased economic productivity; and less money spent on controlling or treating crime and mental illness... A society that brings up children by caring, humane, and non-violent methods is likely to be less violent, healthier, and wealthier.”

**Murray Straus**, Co-Director of the Family Research Laboratory at the University of New Hampshire. From “A Society Without Corporal Punishment.” See [www.nospank.net/straus5.htm](http://www.nospank.net/straus5.htm).

“The most positive social changes around the world have followed mass improvements in the way children are treated.”

**Robin Grille**, author of *Parenting for a Peaceful World*, 2005.

“Children should never receive less protection than adults. . . [we must] put an end to adult justification of violence against children, whether accepted as ‘tradition’ or disguised as ‘discipline’.”



be left in charge of children. Teachers who favor a power-based management style, including the use of corporal punishment, sometimes rise to positions of authority where they set a bad example for everyone under their control and influence. A teacher recounts this experience when he applied for a position in such a place:

“The interview began with the director asking me how I felt about corporal punishment. I told him that I disapproved of it and that I couldn’t and wouldn’t do it. He replied, ‘Well, since that’s the way you feel, you’re of no use to us here,’ and the interview was over.”

School corporal punishment has disappeared nearly everywhere in the developed world. Not one country in Europe permits it, and abolition is spreading at a rapid pace among developing nations. Virtually nowhere is there any movement within governments or among educators to reverse this trend and return to the old ways. Only one country on record temporarily revoked its prohibition against hitting students: Germany during the Nazi era. Meanwhile, approximately 1/4 million beatings are inflicted on students in schools of the United States every year. Typical injuries resulting from this legalized child abuse can be viewed at [www.nospank.net/violatn.htm](http://www.nospank.net/violatn.htm).

What should enlightened, responsible parents do about corporal punishment in their schools? If you knew that a school bus had bald tires and faulty brakes, you would not let your child ride that bus, and you would demand that your school authorities correct the problem immediately. If you knew that the air ducts in your school were contaminated with asbestos and the classrooms were painted with lead-based paint, you’d remove your child immediately and alert other parents to the danger. Corporal punishment is no different. It is very dangerous, and all sensible people in the community should unite in opposition to it.

We should not be surprised that many youngsters reject the adult world to the degree they believe it has rejected them. Nor should we be surprised that those who throughout childhood have been recipients of violence will become dispensers of it as soon as they are able.

Some teachers work tirelessly to curb violence-impacted children’s aggressiveness, to instill trust which those children lack, and to redirect their energies in positive directions. But that is a daunting task for even the most dedicated and best prepared teachers. It requires extraordinary resources unavailable to public school systems.

School dropout, addiction and delinquency would cease to be major problems wracking our nation if only it were possible to persuade parents, teachers and other caretakers to stop socializing children in ways likely to make them antisocial and/or self-destructive.

### **Spanking, smoking, drinking and drugs**

To be spanked is a degrading, humiliating experience. The spanked child absorbs not only the blows but also the message they convey: “You’re worthless. I reject you!” That message powerfully influences the child’s developing personality. It cripples self-esteem.

Sooner or later every child is exposed to substances that promise instant relief from feelings of worthlessness and rejection. Everywhere people can be seen medicating themselves in order to feel good. It’s hard to convince a child who is suffering that something swallowed, inhaled or injected cannot relieve the pain more than briefly, but will compound it by creating additional, serious problems.

### **Spanking and criminal behavior**

Everyone is familiar with the list of social maladies believed to be at the root of violent criminal behavior: poverty, discrimination, family breakdown, narcotics, gangs and easy access to deadly weapons. And it’s clear that every item in the above list contributes to violence and crime. However, one key ingredient is rarely acknowledged—spanking.

In 1940, researchers Sheldon and Eleanor Glueck began their landmark study of delinquent and nondelinquent boys. They discovered how certain early childhood influences cause children to develop antisocial, violent behaviors. They showed that the first signs of delinquency often appear in children as young as three—long before those children come into contact with influences outside the home. The Gluecks showed that parents who fail to manage their children calmly, gently and patiently, but instead rely on physical punishment, tend to produce aggressive, assaultive children. The more severe

and the earlier the mistreatment, the worse the outcome. The Gluecks also found that the lowest incidence of antisocial behavior is associated with children who are reared from infancy in attentive, supportive, nonviolent families.

The message here for all parents is a simple one: if you want to do everything within your power to prevent your child from one day joining the prison population, guide gently and patiently. Remove shaming, shouting, ignoring, threatening, insulting, bullying and spanking from your parenting tool kit.

### **Spanking and prejudice**

Spanking fills some children with anger and the urge to retaliate. But this urge is almost never directly acted upon. Even the most severely spanked children, as a general rule, will not strike back at those who have hurt them. Instead, they are likely to seek relief in fantasy where they can safely vent their anger against make-believe adversaries. Sometimes bullying and acts of cruelty against younger siblings or family pets serve this purpose. Much popular entertainment aimed at young audiences caters to this need.

As children grow and come under the influence of prejudices within their community, their anger can be easily channeled toward scapegoated groups. Hate cults and extremist political factions and sects beckon to them with open arms, offering an opportunity to convert fantasy into reality. In every generation, more than a few seize that offer.

### **Spanking and brain development**

In early childhood, the brain develops faster than any other organ in the body. By age 5, the brain reaches about 90 percent of its adult weight, and by 7, it is fully grown. This makes early childhood a very sensitive and critical period in brain development.

Stress caused by the pain and fear of spanking can negatively affect the development and function of a child's brain. It is precisely during this period of great plasticity and vulnerability that many children are subjected to physical punishment. The effect can be a derailing of natural, healthy brain growth, resulting in life-long and irreversible abnormalities.

According to researcher Dr. Martin Teicher of McLean Hospital in Massachusetts, "We know that an animal exposed to stress and neglect in early life develops a brain that is wired to experience fear, anxiety and stress. We think the same is true of people." (From "Child Abuse Changes the Developing Brain," *Yahoo! News*, Dec. 29, 2000.)

In Teicher's article, "The Neurobiology of Child Abuse," *Scientific American*, March 2002, he writes, "...New brain imaging surveys and other

experiments have shown that child abuse can cause permanent damage to the neural structure and function of the developing brain itself. This grim result suggests that much more effort must be made to prevent childhood abuse and neglect before it does irrevocable harm to millions of young victims (p. 70)... Society reaps what it sows in the way it nurtures children... (p. 75)." See [www.nospank.net/mteicher.htm](http://www.nospank.net/mteicher.htm)

No responsible parent would deliberately jeopardize a child's normal brain development, yet that is precisely what spankers unwittingly do.

### **Spanking at school**

The disciplinary hitting of students in the United States typically involves battering the buttocks with a flat board called a paddle. At the time of this writing, the practice is legal in 19 states. It should be understood that paddling is not the only method used to inflict pain on students. Forced exercise and denial of use of the bathroom, for instance, are commonly used as forms of painful punishment. But paddling, because it is specifically prescribed and so blatant, serves to overshadow and thereby give cover to less obvious forms of abuse.

Corporal punishment is deemed by its users and defenders to be in students' best interests and essential to the smooth functioning of the school. Were that true, schools that are the most punitive would be the highest-performing, students who are routinely punished would be the best behaved, and teachers' colleges would teach paddling. In fact, school systems with the highest rates of corporal punishment are the worst-performing, students who are the most punished are the most troubled and difficult to manage, and there is not one accredited teachers' college in the United States that instructs future educators in the proper method for hitting people. Documented research shows a correlation between school corporal punishment and certain negative social outcomes. States that have the highest rates of school paddling also have the lowest graduation rates, the highest rates of teen pregnancy, the highest incarceration rates and the highest murder rates. See "Correlation between high rates of corporal punishment in public schools and social pathologies," 2002, at [www.nospank.net/correlationstudy.htm](http://www.nospank.net/correlationstudy.htm)

The use of corporal punishment in schools also has a demoralizing effect on teachers who don't condone the practice. They have difficulty working alongside paddlers. Their survival in such an environment depends on their willingness to remain silent about what they witness. They know that paddlers feel threatened by their very presence. It's not unusual for a paddling school to degenerate to a level where it is nothing more than a magnet and safe haven for incompetent teachers, including some who are dangerously unfit to