



Say NO WAY to smacking

Discipline is an important part of the parenting process, but it doesn't need to include corporal punishment. There are plenty of effective alternatives to smacking, and they don't come with negative side effects including resentment and possibly, bullying.

Smacking is back in the news.

It was reported in *The Age* recently that the Royal Australian College of Physicians has called for a legal ban on smacking.

They claim that physical punishment can easily escalate to abuse. Their research shows that physical punishment can lead to a range of negative outcomes including depression, anxiety and substance abuse later on.

When an esteemed group such as this speaks out, then it's time to listen. However I'm not sure that legislation is the answer. It would be so hard to enforce.

Smacking is an emotive issue.

I know some parents smack out of frustration, or even desperation. That too, is a little different. They don't want to, but their kids or circumstances get the better of them. Guilt and recrimination often follows.

Most reasonable people rile at the notion of abusive treatment but there are many people who believe a little smack in the right circumstances is okay.

I'm not so sure. You either believe smacking is okay or you don't.

Parenting should reflect the real world that we are preparing our children for. Our discipline needs to reflect the times in which we live. We expect civil treatment in all our dealings with others so we need to reflect the same expectations in our treatment of kids.

We don't condone corporal punishment in childcare centres, preschools and schools, so we shouldn't condone it at home.

Besides, I'm not convinced that smacking works in the long term. There is a considerable body of knowledge that suggests that learning self-regulation and impulse control are keys to responsible, social behaviour in children. Smacking works against this by encouraging avoidance of certain behaviours rather than promoting self-regulatory behaviour. It also leads to resentment when repeatedly used.

What are the alternatives?

For disciplinary techniques other than smacking, parents need look no further than the methods used in childcare centres and schools. The use of consequential learning and restorative justice



techniques, when properly applied are effective and strict enough to help kids regulate their behaviours.

These sound like complicated terms but the tips below are examples of these techniques in practice.

Some children, whether due to an individual condition or their temperament, need individual behaviour management plans. None of these involve smacking. They do require a great deal of parental attention, patience and energy to make work. Your local general practitioner or your child's teacher are good people to talk to initially if a child's behaviour is overwhelming you.

Parents don't parent well in isolation so reach out for assistance, particularly when a child's poor behaviour is wearing you down.

Alternatives to smacking:

- 1. Time out:** This is designed to either give kids a chance to think about their behaviour or just break a pattern of poor behaviour. It doesn't work for all but it's a better alternative than smacking. Time out doesn't have to be in their bedrooms; sometimes a chair or mat near you is enough.
- 2. Parental time-out:** Make sure your kids are safe then go to the bathroom for a time if you are about to lose your cool.
- 3. Behavioural consequences:** Implement a consequence (*e.g. remove from a their friends if hurting them, go home if misbehaving in public*) that is related to the crime, reasonable and respectful to kids. Don't over talk while putting it in place and stick to your guns because kids can say things to make you feel guilty.
- 4. Tactical ignoring:** Recognise that some misbehaviour is designed to get up your nose so don't let it work.
- 5. Pre-empt poor behaviour:** I know kids can be unpredictable but smart parents will get on the front foot and minimise the likelihood of poor behaviour. Think ahead and prepare kids and yourself when you go into public spaces. Make sure your routines are child friendly. And make sure the kids get good attention when they are behaving well, because some kids mess up just to be noticed.



The job of parents is to socialise kids so they can take their place in the world. Discipline is essentially a teaching process that requires a mixture of explanation, limits and boundaries, and a willingness to follow through with respectful action. It also requires a strong backbone, a compassionate heart and heaps of patience, but under no circumstances does it require a firm hand.

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