

To Spank or Not to Spank?

A father was recently arrested by the police for **spanking** his child, starting a **debate** among the American public about spanking. Is spanking, or other types of **corporal punishment**, an acceptable form of **discipline** for children? Or is it a form of **child abuse**?

The case that has everyone talking is the arrest of Dale Clover, a thirty-six-year-old father of three, at a shopping mall in St. Louis, Missouri. He was arrested after an employee at the mall saw him spanking his five-year-old son, Donny, and called the police. The father was arrested for child abuse. Mr. Clover admits that he hit his son but says that it wasn't child abuse. He says it was discipline. Across the country, parents **disagree** on this **issue**: What is the difference between loving discipline and child abuse? Some parents, like Rhonda Moore, see a clear difference between spanking and child abuse.

Rhonda Moore: A little bit of pain is necessary to teach a child what is right and wrong. It's like **burning** your hand when you touch a hot stove. Pain is nature's way of teaching us. Spanking is done out of love. Child abuse is done out of anger, when the parent loses control. When I spank my children, I always talk to them before and **afterward**, and explain why they are being spanked. I explain what they did wrong, and they remember not to do it again. They respect me as a parent. My children understand that I'm spanking them for their own good.

Reporter: Taylor Robinson, father of four, feels that parents should never hit their children for any reason.

Taylor: I want my children to learn right and wrong, but not out of fear of being hit. Spanking teaches children to fear their parents, not respect them. When a parent spanks a child, what the child learns is that problems should be **solved** with violence. They learn that it's acceptable for parents to hurt their children. None of these are lessons that I want to teach my children. I want my children to learn to talk about their problems and solve them without violence, but spanking doesn't teach that.

Reporter: Parents are **split** about corporal punishment, and doctors also disagree about the issue. Dr. John Oparah thinks our child abuse laws sometimes go too far.

Dr. Oparah: Today, many children don't respect their parents. Children need strong, loving discipline. Sometimes spanking is the best way to get a child's attention, to make sure the child listens to the parent. I've known loving parents who have had police officers come to their door

and say, "Your child reported that you hit him." They're treated like criminals. As a society, we complain all the time that our young people are getting into more and more **trouble**, **committing** crimes—yet when parents try to control their children, they're punished. Some parents are afraid to discipline their children because their neighbors **might** call the police.

Reporter: However, most doctors say that there are many **harmful effects** of spanking. Dr. Beverly Lau is **opposed** to spanking.

Dr. Lau: Spanking can **lead** to more violent **behavior** in children. Studies show that children who are spanked are more violent when they grow up. **In the long run**, spanking doesn't work well; it's not as **effective** as other forms of discipline. A child may stop **misbehaving** for the moment, but over time, children who are spanked actually misbehave more than children who are not spanked. **Research** shows that if you want a peaceful family, don't spank your kids.

Reporter: What are the **long-term** effects of spanking as a child gets older and becomes an adult? Here are the opinions of three experts.

Lawyer, Donald Sterling: I've seen it over and over again. Violent criminals were almost always spanked and hit when they were children. This corporal punishment teaches children to be violent when they are very young, so when they are adults, they **commit** crimes and abuse their wives and children. And then their children grow up to be violent, and the **cycle** continues.

Psychologist, Dr. Jones: We studied 332 families to see how parents' actions **affected** teenagers' behavior. We found that teenagers did better when they had clear discipline as a child. Some of these parents used spanking as a form of discipline, and some didn't. It seems that spanking doesn't hurt children if it's done in a loving home, but it's most important to talk to your children and spend time with them. Spanking should be the choice of the parents.

Child Psychologist, Dr. Goldin: In the United States, the number of parents who spank their kids is **decreasing**, and people who **oppose** spanking say that's good because it will make our society less violent. But look at the statistics. Actually, violent crime is **rising** every year, and the number of teenagers and children that commit crimes is going up the fastest! Parents need to control their children better, and **corporal punishment** is one way to do that.