



Spanking: A Valid Option for Parents

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The American College of Pediatricians (ACPeds) takes issue with the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) recent statement, [Effective Discipline to Raise Healthy Children](#), which declares all disciplinary spanking by parents to be harmful to children. This statement continues to rely upon poorly designed, biased studies, despite the ACPeds' 2017 challenge to the AAP that their "[Research on Disciplinary Spanking is Misleading](#)." It almost exclusively emphasizes what NOT to do (don't ever spank) with little about how parents should respond to persistent misbehavior, especially when milder disciplinary measures haven't worked.¹ In the report, 18 paragraphs, all 7 bullet points, and almost all of the 4 policy recommendations focus on spanking without mentioning any alternative responses to misbehavior. This is hardly a statement on "effective discipline" and more a rant against spanking, in contrast to the far more comprehensive policy it replaces,² and furthers the AAP's baseless campaign against spanking by parents.

Moreover, the diatribe against all spanking ("however light", p. 2) seems based on advocacy efforts more than a fair objective summary of the scientific evidence. The Background section features the "Global Initiative to End all Corporal Punishment of Children" rather than objective scientific evidence about spanking and any alternative disciplinary measures that could replace it. Also, instead of considering all five summaries of available research on physical punishment published since 2000,³⁻⁷ the Policy Statement relies on the one opposed to all spanking, even though 96% of its evidence came from correlations and associations, rather than evidence of true causation.⁷ Only researchers who are advocating for a pre-determined conclusion would rely on correlations as their primary evidence in evaluating a corrective disciplinary procedure or even a corrective medical procedure.

Young children need correction and, at times, punishment from their parents to learn appropriate behavior and self-control — key ingredients for their future success in life. For the more defiant and contrary young child, time-out and reasoning do not consistently work. Compared to other corrective measures, using spanking to enforce milder tactics has been shown to result in less defiance and less aggression than 77% of alternative measures (including time-out) with these children.⁴ As conceded by the AAP statement authors, over 70% of parents today agree that "spanking is at times necessary in the discipline of young children." Executive member, Dr. Den Trumbull, states, "The AAP advice leaves parents helpless with the defiant, non-compliant child, removing a discipline option that can be very effective when *selectively* used." Despite the recent avalanche of biased research against all physical punishment, evidence indicates ordinary spanking to be a valid and needed disciplinary option when 2- to 6-year-olds refuse to cooperate with milder measures.⁴

This press release is available on the ACPeds website at <https://www.acpeds.org/spanking-a-valid-option-for-parents>.

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