

Minnesota Coalition for Battered Women

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Please Don't Spank Children

Violence Begets Violence:

Many of us were raised in families and communities where spanking is a common form of child discipline. While many people believe that spanking a child is acceptable, battered women's advocates have long promoted no violence policies in our programs and communities. We believe that spanking children condones the very violence we are working to eliminate in our families and society. Our "no violence" or "no spanking" policy means that adults are not allowed to use physical violence or threats of violence with children. It makes no sense to provide shelter or advocacy for women who are being battered at home and then allow their children to be hit. We believe that modeling a no violence standard for child discipline is a very important part of our social change movement to end violence against women and their children in our homes. Imagine a world where no child was ever spanked and all children were taught that **Hands Are Not For Hitting**.

Since many parents spank their children at least occasionally, we recognize that a no spanking policy takes away an option that women have used to control their children. Many battered women may have faced serious consequences from their abusers if they could not control their children's behavior. Also, in the wider community there are also serious consequences, particularly for working class children and children of color, if parents fail to control their children's behavior. So we are sensitive to a mother's fear of losing control and teach non-violent discipline techniques that all staff and other mothers demonstrate.

Use Time-Outs:

The most common non-violent alternative to spanking is using "time-outs." The time-out is not punishment, but a means to remove a child from a troublesome situation so the child can regain control of his/her behavior. Use a time-out when a child is behaving in an unacceptable way. Go to the child, face her/him, and tell her/him which behavior is not okay (hitting, spitting, refusing to pick up toys or get dressed, etc.) and that he or she needs to have a time-out. Speak to him or her in a serious tone but do not yell, grab, or jerk the child. Move the child to a location away from other children and adults. Tell her/him that she/he needs to stay in the time-out for X number of minutes. (Keep it short—one recommendation is one minute per one year of the child's age.) Repeat to the child that the behavior was the problem, not the child. Tell the child that you love him/her but that the behavior is not okay. Tell the child that you will come back for her/him in X minutes. Return to the child and explain once again which behavior was unacceptable and ask if the child understands. Reassure the child that you love her/him and allow the child to return to previous activities. You'll be surprised—children respond very well to time-outs.

Other Non-Violent Discipline Techniques:

*Catching children being good. *Notice and praise the behavior you like. *Give stickers or stars for desired behaviors. *Keep children busy and happy—don't expect them to sit idle with nothing to do. *Distract young children who are quarreling by changing activities or toys. *Spend time with children and give them individual attention and warmth. *Ignore tolerable attention-getting behavior. *Firmly tell a child to stop a behavior and restate your rule or expectation. *Remove from a group any child who repeatedly fails to follow the rules of the group. *Remove privileges from older children who misbehave.

Adapted from "Who Will Speak for Me" training manual for children's advocates, Minnesota Coalition for Battered Women.