



American College of Pediatricians

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Patient Information Handout Series

GUIDELINES FOR PARENTAL USE OF DISCIPLINARY SPANKING

1. Spanking should be used selectively for clear, deliberate misbehavior, particularly that which arises from a child's persistent defiance of a parent's instruction. It should be used only when the child receives at least as much encouragement and praise for good behavior as correction for problem behavior.
2. Milder forms of discipline, such as verbal correction, extinction, logical and natural consequences, and time-out should be used initially, followed by spanking when noncompliance persists. Spanking has been shown to be an effective method of enforcing time-out with the child who refuses to comply.
3. Only a parent, or in exceptional situations someone else who has an intimate relationship of authority with the child, should administer disciplinary spanking.
4. Spanking should not be administered on impulse or when a parent is out of control. A spanking should always be motivated by love, for the purpose of teaching and correcting, and not for revenge or retaliation.
5. Spanking is inappropriate before 15 months of age and is usually not necessary until after 18 months. It should be less necessary after 6 years and rarely, if ever, used after 10 years of age.
6. After 10 months of age, one slap to the hand of a stubborn crawler or toddler may be necessary to stop serious misbehavior when distraction and removal have failed. This is particularly the case when the forbidden object is immovable and dangerous, such as a hot oven door or an electrical outlet.
7. Spanking should always be a *planned* action (not a reaction) by the parent and should follow a deliberate procedure.
 - The child should be *forewarned* of the spanking consequence for designated problem behaviors.
 - Spanking should always be administered in *private* (bedroom or restroom) to avoid public humiliation or embarrassment.
 - One or two spanks are administered to the buttocks. This is followed by embracing the child and calmly reviewing the offense and the desired behavior in an effort to reestablish a warm relationship.
8. Spanking should leave only transient redness of the skin and should not cause physical injury.
9. If properly administered spankings are ineffective, other disciplinary responses should be tried again rather than increasing the intensity of spankings. Professional help should be obtained when a satisfactory behavioral response cannot be achieved through the process of discipline.