

Spanking is Always Unnecessary I: Introduction



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“One Improved Unit” is an original column appearing sporadically on Thursday at Everything-Voluntary.com, by the founder and editor Skyler J. Collins. Archived columns can be found here. OIU-only RSS feed available here.

The practice of spanking children in particular, and child punishment in general, was abandoned in my family in August of 2011. We’ve never looked back. Sure my children have had their hard moments, but I’ve managed to find better ways to help them through than with spanking or time-outs. In every case, I either found and dealt with the unmet need that caused the problem, or failing that, got them through their trouble with empathy, compassion, and humor. I am now completely unconvinced that spanking, or any punishment of children, is ever necessary. So I thought I’d write this six-part series examining the reasons people give for these deplorable practices, with emphasis on the worst form of child punishment, spanking. Let’s begin!

Reasons for Spanking

Many are the reasons parents give for spanking their children. They were likely spanked themselves and believe they “turned out just fine”, so they’ve decided to continue the practice. Their parenting tool box contains just a few tools for dealing with conflicts between them and their children; the spanking tool sits conveniently at the top. Aside from conflicts, many reasons concern the belief that children need to be spanked. Here are the reasons that I’ll address in this series:

- To prevent a child from misbehaving, by teaching consequences.
- To keep a child from hurting themselves; to keep a child from hurting others.
- To discipline a child to become a proper adult; to toughen up a child to live in a cruel world.
- To teach a child respect and obedience toward authority.
- To raise a child the way God says we should.

Unmet Needs

The best approaches I’ve discovered to raising children are founded on the idea that

children have needs, and in their attempt to meet them, they make mistakes. Put another way, every act of so-called “misbehavior” is in reality a failed attempt by the child to meet his own needs. The unmet need is sometimes obvious (he’s antsy and needs to move), but often not (he’s angry because of the actions of someone or something unrelated to the current situation). If we as parents shift our focus from “discipline” to determining and meeting our children’s needs, the idea that spanking is always unnecessary becomes obvious.

Final Thoughts

As I hope to show throughout this series, children don’t need to be spanked. Ever. What they need is our empathy, compassion, focus, and willingness to dig as deep as necessary to determine what needs of theirs we’re failing to meet that’s causing them to behave in undesirable ways. And sometimes we just need to reexamine our own expectations of how children of any age should behave. They’re often doing exactly as they should considering their unmet needs and their maturity.

Spanking is Always Unnecessary II: Preventing Misbehavior

Spanking is Always Unnecessary III: Hurting Themselves or Others

Spanking is Always Unnecessary IV: Discipline and Toughness

Spanking is Always Unnecessary V: Respect and Obedience

Spanking is Always Unnecessary VI: Divine Mandate

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