

Spanking Kids is a Result of Your Pain, Not Their Behavior.

What I am about to say is probably going to upset a lot of people, but...

Hitting children (yes, spanking is hitting) is an extremely childish response that reflects a lack of emotional maturity and self-control. Odds are, if you spank your child, then you, too, were spanked. Therefore, you also were not taught how to regulate emotions. You were taught that you hit when you feel a lot. It is a cycle that is literally hard wired into our brains, and it requires much energy and effort to break the cycle and rewire the way our brain responds.

There's also a more vulnerable piece here:

....Spanking also reflects the pain you carry.

This same idea goes for our children. If they are acting in ways that you deem unacceptable or “bad,” it doesn’t mean they are inherently bad, it means they are in pain, having trouble, and struggling with something. You see, children don’t have the capacity to communicate what is going on inside of them, so they act it out through behavior. For an adult who wasn’t taught to identify their emotions and own them as their own, spanking or swatting is, unfortunately, the easiest way to respond to a child who has triggered us. We are literally being exactly like a child when we hit. We are in our child minds because we were not taught a better way.

I believe that things like anger and frustration are surface emotions. If you can go a layer or two deeper, you will almost always feel more tenderness and sadness or something that feels more vulnerable. This is true for children as well. It is our job as adults to identify the deeper feeling that is driving the “bad” behavior, not join them in their chaos. For example, if your child runs out into the street, for most of us, the immediate feeling is anger and frustration. But beneath that it is fear. We fear for our child’s life because they could get really hurt, or worse, and that is scary because we love and care about them so deeply and couldn’t imagine life without them. That is the more vulnerable truth. That is what will connect you to your child. That is the message you can send to them in one way or another and have them actually feel you. They don’t need pain to feel you. They can feel love, too. The question is, how committed can you be to letting your guard down enough to let them feel your heart, instead of your hand?

I know many parents will laugh and claim that their child won’t listen to a firm, yet loving, authentic response. To that I asked, have you ever tried? Also, laughing is a defense mechanism when something feels vulnerable, which is what I am talking about here. It

requires us to change on a fundamental level, and that is scary because it pokes at our identity to self (assuming you are like me and were not brought up to express authentically and vulnerably).

If I could tell every parent who chooses spanking as a tool to correct behavior **ONE THING**, it would be this:

Spanking has nothing to do with the behavior of your child, and everything to do with your inability to cope with how it triggers your own emotions. Spanking is also easier when you take the behavior personally and think that it means something about you. Me vs. Them mentality.

So what can you do?

I think the most important steps to take are ones that totally rearrange your perspective on toddler/child behavior. We have to have a basis of understanding of the inner workings of a child's mind to have the incentive to choose a better route. If we are simply committed to the school of thought that says, "kids are just brats," then yea, everyone wants to smack a brat.

Here are a few ideas that you can start to adopt that will really help you when it is feeling intense with your child:

Parenting is a long game:

So knock it off with the things that only get you short term results. Sure, spanking "works," as in, it puts a stop to unwanted behavior, but stealing also works if I want something from the grocery store. I get the thing I want in the moment, but it isn't the best way to go about it. Not to mention, I am left with feelings of paranoia and guilt that bleed into all other areas of my life. So yes, parenting is a long game. You are in this for the long haul, so commit to the diligent work that it takes to raise a human. Hitting is lazy. Parenting takes a lot of time and energy. Explaining over and over, getting on their level, communication, repetition are all required for children. They are not supposed to "get it" the first time, or even the second or third. They are brand new to this world and don't come with all the concepts and understandings that adults have. They have to learn it and it takes time. You might have to explain it twenty times. That is normal. It doesn't mean they don't listen, it just means they are still figuring it all out. If they are older then they might be testing boundaries. This is also normal and I would be worried if my child was so docile that he never tested boundaries. I am an adult and I still test the boundaries of those around me. You can simply state what you see and hold to your boundaries. This is how you establish trust.

There is actually nothing wrong with a tantrum:

Isn't this great news?! I cannot tell you how many times I have heard parents justify hitting because their child is throwing a tantrum. Again, there is nothing wrong with it, so you are free of the obligation to end it. You can just let them have it. I know. What a relief, right?

Look, I get it. Many of us were raised to believe that our emotions in their fullest (and even mildest) expressions were unwanted and a problem. I am here to tell you, they are not, and so, neither are your child's. Feelings happen. They don't have the brain capacity to regulate emotions (see next point). The greatest gift you can give your child is the permission to feel their feelings. If you do, chances are they won't be an adult who grows up unable to show emotion, only to later take it out on their kids who trigger them.

"But what about if we are in public?!"

Then get right with yourself. That feeling of embarrassment and the urgency to make it stop this instant has nothing to do with your child. Those are your feelings based on your beliefs about what it means about you to have an upset child. I think if you develop an understanding into what is going on in those moments, it makes it less embarrassing.

Toddlers and young children don't have fully developed brains:

They literally cannot help their behavior much of the time. They are dominated by their right brain, for starters. They don't fully develop the left brain traits of logic and control until later. Their outbursts and doing things you told them not to is not because they are brats. They literally cannot control it. Here is a quote from the book, 'The Whole-Brain Child', by Dr. Dan Siegel:

"when a child is upset, logic often won't work until we have responded to the right brain's emotional needs."

So if your child is not "listening" to your words, ask yourself if you are listening to their emotional needs that their behavior is reflecting in that moment.

For a more in depth understanding of your child's brain development and how it influences their behavior, please read this book!

Your child is not giving you a hard time. Your child is having a hard time:

Make this like your mantra. When you are feeling out of control and wanting to yell or hit, remind yourself of this. It takes you out of the me vs. them mentality and allows you to feel compassion for them. It also calls for you to seek solutions because you see that they are having a problem. If you can recognize that their behavior isn't to be taken personally, then you can see them objectively and act from there, rather than from a victimized position.

The point of parenting is not to control another person, anyway:



Somewhere along the way we adopted the idea that our jobs as parents is about controlling these tiny humans and making sure they are obedient. I don't know about you, but I do not want to raise an obedient child. That doesn't mean I allow him to call all the shots and run amok, either. It simply means that I am perfectly fine with him questioning and challenging everyone and everything, including me. If you have a particularly bold child, be thankful, and learn how to play, negotiate and encourage cooperation there. Look at where it is hard to let go of the idea that our children need to be acting "perfect" at all times. How does it make YOU feel when they don't? How were you treated when you acted in a way that made your parents uncomfortable? How did it feel?

"Morality is doing what's right no matter what you're told. Obedience is doing what you're told no matter what's right." - H.L. Mencken

Punishment or making someone pay is not necessary in order to learn lessons:

We have this really unfortunate idea in our culture that children can only learn through pain and punishment. I have even heard, "If you don't punish your kids, how do they learn?!"

The same way you learn. Natural consequences, cause and effect, and having people around you that you can trust to tell you how you affect them. It is actually sad and very telling of people's view of their own self-worth when they believe pain is required to teach a lesson. It suggests revenge and retaliation as the preferred method of teaching.

Discipline (coming from the word 'disciple') means, "to teach", and we know humans can be taught without being hurt in the process. Of course, this requires a certain amount of skill and emotional intelligence from the parents, which can be lacking if they, too, were

not treated respectfully as children.

If it doesn't promote connection, drop it:

If your actions create disconnection between you and your child then they are not worth carrying out. I know many people like to claim that hitting makes kids respect you, but it does not. No one respects anyone who hits them. No one. They might fear you and comply because they are afraid, but that is not respect. Our ultimate goal in parenting should be to maintain connection with our child. Choose actions and words that reflect that, and remember, you can still be firm and set boundaries and maintain connection, just like you might with your spouse. It is what will have them trusting that they can come to you later in life when issues arise.

"to enter into a state of pure connection with your child, you can achieve this by setting aside any sense of superiority."

— *Shefali Tsabary, The Conscious Parent*

The hard part about conscious parenting is that if we are going to connect to our child's emotions, it means that we have to connect with our own, and so many of us spend a lifetime avoiding that. Knowing that your child can be a reflection of yourself and your own pain isn't always easy to witness, but it is rewarding in the end, for both you and your children.