

The Case for NAP Parenting

We all have principles that guide our decisions.

A principle usually defines what someone won't do, like "I won't shop there because they don't pay their employees well" or "I won't go on another date with that guy because he was so rude to the waitress".

In the Western world, the most primary or important principles are generally shared, and commonly, our law is in agreement with these shared principles.

Murder, theft, assault, etc... Our laws are consistent with the position most people share that these acts are wrong.

What these moral and legal crimes have in common, is that they are acts of aggression, defined as the initiation of force against someone else's body or property.

An act of force is non-voluntary or non-consensual. For example; consensual transaction of property is called trade, whereas non-consensual transaction is called theft or fraud.

The "Non-Aggression Principle" (or NAP) is a way of summarizing this key moral principle we share. It also prohibits fraud or threats, while permitting self-defense.

Self-defense does not meet the definition of aggression, as it is not the initiation of force, but rather a reaction to it with the goal of protecting life and property.

The NAP, though given that term in recent history, has been at the heart of common law and western culture for millennia.

All of this is to say that even if someone has never heard of the NAP, most of us generally abide by it in our lives. Of importance to this discussion, it should be noted that we also instruct children to abide by the NAP (don't hit, don't steal, etc...)

Principles are Universal..

A crowning achievement of philosophy is that principles, by definition, are universal; meaning they don't discriminate by race, sex, etc.

"It's wrong to steal from people, unless they have red hair" or "It's wrong to solve your arguments by hitting, unless you're arguing with a woman" are invalid or inconsistent principles, as they are not universal. These positions are racist or sexist, by discriminating based on physical features. We also have universal standards for aggressors; if you've ever thought, "The judge was only lenient with that person because of their identity" then you

are pointing out a violation of the universality of a principle. Valid moral theories oppose these inconsistencies.

...except for Children?

We live in a society where parents and guardians promote and use aggression towards children that would be considered immoral and criminal if inflicted on other adults.

Studies show that the majority of American parents have hit their child, and believe hitting their child is sometimes appropriate. Using 'corporal punishment' in the home is legal in all 50 states. A quick internet search of "how to discipline a child" returns articles describing three strategies that are most commonly proposed for controlling children's behavior: time-outs, confiscation of property, and spanking. Amongst adults these would be considered illegal confinement, theft, and assault.

The popular moral position of our society is inconsistent, a hypocrisy.

Take the above examples and substitute 'child' for the victim. "It's wrong to steal from people... but it's ok to confiscate toys from a child" and "It's wrong to solve arguments by hitting... but it's ok to spank a child". This is the status quo. These acts meet the definition of aggression, and discriminate based on age.

Being consistent in the NAP and in the pursuit of equal rights means committing to working peacefully with children, just as we work peacefully with other adults. Children deserve the same, or better, legal and social protections that adults enjoy.

As with adults, the use of force should only be used in defense, or as a last resort to prevent more serious harm (such as pushing someone out of the way of oncoming traffic). Aggression toward children, who are defenseless, should be considered a more serious wrongdoing than aggression towards people capable of self-defense.

This is a moral argument, meaning we shouldn't stop hitting kids simply because it's ineffective; we should stop because it's wrong.

We wouldn't argue that slavery is wrong because it's economically inefficient, the stronger position concerns the inconsistent moral principle.

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