

Chapter 3 – Hurting Themselves or Others

Table of Contents

Previous – Chapter 2, Preventing Misbehavior

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It might seem logical to cause a child pain in order to teach him what pain feels like, so that he'll refrain from hurting himself or others. Unfortunately, when a caretaker intentionally hurts his child, he's doing far more than teaching him what pain feels like, as well as ignoring the alternatives to teaching him to be safe and to keep his hands to himself. I'll explore both scenarios to see why spanking is unnecessary.

Hurting Themselves

Touching a hot stove, sticking a fork in an electrical socket, running into the street, these are just three of the countless ways our children can unintentionally hurt themselves. What's going on here when children do this? They're being curious. They don't know or haven't experienced something, and they want to. What better way to satisfy their curiosity than through approach and touch? Their ignorance of the full scope of potential consequences to their curiosity can get them into some real trouble. What should we caretakers do? Should we immediately intervene and give them a spanking and a scolding, "Don't do that!"? That might work, at least to the point of making them think twice before engaging in that particular bout of curiosity (diminishing the instinct in the process). But since there're a thousand plus ways for children to hurt themselves, will spanking protect them from every way?

I don't think so. Besides the costs of spanking, which I'll get to below, spanking, as I showed in the last chapter, does nothing to address the needs of the child, nor prepare him for the future. The desire to touch a hot stove is an attempt to meet a child's need to know what's going on up there, what his caretaker is up to. Rather than spanking, it's been my experience that lifting the child up to see what's going on and telling him about the danger in touching the stove – and even showing the child by touching it myself and making "Ouch!" sounds – has been sufficiently effective. Same goes for electrical outlets and running into the street. Simply explain or show the danger to the child, and just as importantly, follow that up with a request to seek your help when they want to see what's going on, to figure out something, or to cross the street. And of course, until they've learned to be careful through your consistent and respectful guidance, little children probably shouldn't be left alone in the face of certain types of dangers. Although, I think some dangers are quite okay to experience first-hand. "Experience is a great teacher," as John Legend put it.

Hurting Others

Children can hurt others either by accident or on purpose. Accidents can be dealt with on the same basis as when children accidentally hurt themselves (see above), but what about when one child intentionally hurts another child? Should the child be spanked (hit) to learn that hitting others is wrong? That's a contradictory message. On the one hand one, it teaches the child that if he hurts someone else, he will be hurt himself. And on the other hand, it teaches the child that hitting is not always wrong, that is, hitting is okay when you are bigger and are trying to teach someone smaller not to hit. Ultimately, it teaches that the strong may use violence over the weak.

The more important question, however, is why does one child feel it necessary to hit another child? What compels him to employ such violent means? He clearly feels uneasy about the state of things around him, and desires to change them. Maybe the other child has an interesting toy. Or maybe the other child initiated the violence. In either case, the child is limited in his knowledge of the appropriate means to achieve his desired ends. Spanking the child fails to address this. What the child needs is the guidance to meet his needs properly. I covered several alternatives in the last chapter, but more, he might need some help understanding the effects his violence has on others. Describe for him how the other child is feeling now that he's been made to feel pain, and ask the child about why he felt it necessary to use violence to get what he wants. Explore the situation with him in a compassionate and respectful way, probably at a time after the stress-induced cortisol levels in his brain have receded. Besides the contradictory message, there are other costs to a caretaker inflicting pain on his child.

Inflicting Pain

In my opinion, there are serious costs to the relationship between people when the bigger and stronger party claims the right to inflict pain on the smaller and weaker one. How many adult relationships would last under this arrangement? How many kid relationships would last? It makes me wonder how many caretaker/child relationships would last under this arrangement if this right to inflict pain didn't also include the right to force the association or the fact of dependency by the child on the caretaker. Such a relationship is already quite unequal, with all power residing on one side. The only recourse the child has is feeling something intense toward his treatment. Resentment and anger destroys relationships because it destroys the trust and love that relationships depend on. It also incentivizes the child to disassociate as often as possible and cover up behavior that would earn him a spanking.

Does a child who's hurt another child "deserve" to be hurt? Maybe; maybe not. But is that the wisest course of action if the goal is to raise a child who learns to respect and have compassion for others? Children who aren't given respect and compassion when they need

it the most, during these times of weakness and ignorance, never learn the value and importance of respect and compassion. The intentional infliction of pain from caretaker to child is not only unnecessary, but counter-productive if the desire is to live in a world filled with respectful and compassionate people.

Pain is a natural part of life. It doesn't need to be arbitrarily created to experience. When children are in danger of hurting themselves, it's because they lack knowledge and wisdom. Such ignorance also leads to children using violence to get what they want. The remedy to ignorance is not spanking, or any other kind of punishment. Rather, the remedy is respectful and compassionate guidance by a trusted caretaker, and the resultant life experience.

Next - Chapter 4, Discipline and Toughness