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CORPORAL PUNISHMENT CAUTIONS

Discipline is about a mentor, parent, sage, wise man or woman, and so forth teaching, showing, modeling, mentoring a disciple (a child, for example) to lead an honorable and healthy way to live life.

Discipline is about teaching self-control, which is not synonymous with controlling children. Adults often get caught up in controlling children for their own purposes and needs (including some unhealthy ones) rather than controlling them for safety and learning and to help them learn self-control.

Discipline includes a lot about learning and holding healthy boundaries.

Discipline starts first w/ getting the child's attention. Only after getting the child's attention comes the possibility of teaching or discipline being learned.

Talking to the child... expressing disappointment, etc. is an attempt to get the child's attention.

Arguably, if talking to the child is not sufficient to get his/her attention, then an adult will try something else to get his/her attention.

Corporal punishment gets the child's attention in one of two ways: either by the shock of the adult hitting/spanking the child, or by the pain of the hit/spank.

Corporal punishment is a traditional way to discipline children- a way to teach about life & relationship, to teach boundaries, to teach what is acceptable or not to be functional and successful in a community. It is particularly traditional for people of color, poor people, disempowered & disenfranchised communities, and oppressed people. It is the traditional form of totalitarian societies (feudal societies) to control it's population.

Corporal punishment is a relatively efficient form of child control. However, it can virtually completely ignore self-esteem issues, developmental needs, attachment needs, or to put it otherwise short-term and long-term emotional, psychological, social, relationship, and other consequences.

However, corporal punishment is legal in most if not all states. And, arguably can have a role in discipline. Realistically, it is a part of many families' discipline process. Those people who wish to abolish corporal punishment may work to do so. As long as it remains legal, the professional has an ethical and legal obligation to prevent corporal punishment to become child abuse.

Key criteria and principles to hold (and teach parents) about corporal punishment:



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Everyone tends to operate with the principle of intensification, that is if something doesn't work, the first (sometimes, the second, third, and only) response is to intensify. That means to take what hasn't worked and do it again more intensely. If talking doesn't work, then talking more or yelling... then yelling louder, then screaming. That means w/ corporal punishment, intensification means hitting more or hitting harder.

What is the difference between one spank, five spanks, ten to twenty spanks? If one spank does not get the child's attention, then arguably five spanks might get his/her attention. When the adult continues to spank past ten and to twenty times, the intensification certainly would have long past gotten the child's attention. So, why is the adult still spanking? Because of frustration turning into anger turning into rage, which means the adult has lost self-control and **THE CHILD IS AT GREATER RISK TO BE ABUSED!** The professional can tell the parent both these things: "if you spank beyond a few spanks, getting his/her attention is no longer relevant. You are losing control and more likely to abuse the child. And, it becomes more likely that I or someone else will **MAKE A CHILD ABUSE REPORT** on you."

The professional can also assertively tell parents:

Never strike the face, head, trunk of body, stomach, back, or groin area. You can cause internal injuries. Striking the fleshy flesh of the hand or bottom is much less likely to cause internal injuries.

Never use your back of your hand, close your hand to use your fist or kick with your foot. Fist or foot strikes create a harder force and more likely to create trauma or injury.

Never use a weapon. Shoes, switches, paddles, belts, or any other inanimate object is a weapon. When you use a weapon, you have no sensory feedback as to how much pain or trauma you have caused. When you spank with your open hand, you feel the pain yourself that you are inflicting. If it hurts your hand, that is comparable to how the child feels the hurt. If your hand hurts too much to continue, then you are more likely to stop before injuring your child.

This information is not to condone or encourage corporal punishment. It offers information and insight to the underlying principles and dangers of corporal punishment. It asserts that parents who use corporal punishment need to be taught boundaries to protect children from abuse, and themselves from committing abuse (and being reported to CPS). This comes from a training that I conduct for professionals on child abuse.

Biography

Ronald Mah, therapist and educator, combines concepts, principles, and philosophy with practical techniques and guidelines for effective and productive results. He uses humor and



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stories from his many experiences to illustrate important points in a stimulating and highly motivating and engaging style.

A Licensed Marriage & Family Therapist, his experiences include: Asian-American community mental health, Severely Emotionally Disturbed mental health & school partnership programs, vocational programs for at risk youth, welfare to work programs, clinical consulting & cross and multi-cultural training for Head Start, other early childhood education programs, social services organizations, & mental health agencies, supervising a high school mental health clinic, training and supervising therapists, private practice in Castro Valley, author of the Asian Pacific Islander Parent Education Support curriculum.

Professional Education experiences include: 16 years in ECE, including owning and running a child development center for 11 years, Kindergarten, elementary, & secondary teaching credentials and experience, ethnic studies curriculum writer, community college instructor, Masters of Psychology instructor, and former member Board of Directors of the California Kindergarten Association and of the California Association of Marriage & Family Therapists.