

## “The Road to Hell is Paved With Good Intentions”: The Smacking Debate.

In every child born there are a multitude of seeds all waiting to be nurtured and watered eventually sprouting roots and emerging from their fertile soil. If we nurture the seeds of love, faith, non-violence, compassion and honesty, these attributes will grow strong and in abundance however, if the seeds of hate, jealousy, intolerance, violence, fear and envy are watered they too will bear fruit.

As parents we are responsible for developing a child’s view of the world around them. The view we create for them, will likely follow them through the course of their lifetime. We can help them to develop a view of a world of possibilities, abundance and magnificent and we can also create a view of an antagonistic world where fear, unhappiness and anger predominate.

Gandhi said “Even if I am a minority of one – the truth is the truth”. And the truth I know is that when we smack our children, when we use violence of any kind, for whatever reason, however we may try to justify it in our own minds, we not only damage the precious bonds of love and trust with our children we damage their pride and self esteem and sow the seeds of violence, fear, intolerance and anger.

Our whole way of thinking about the way we raise and discipline our children must be addressed and changed, from the inside out.

What is a “safe” smack? I know, without a shadow of a doubt, that there is no such thing as a safe smack. If you believe that smacking is an effective and safe way to discipline your children and that what I am saying is a load of @#\$\$#, then I ask only that you take a moment to listen. Really listen.

Violence, hate, fear greed, and war are the order of the day. If we cannot change our own deeply ingrained habits of thinking, feeling, sensing and acting that gave birth to the problems we face, they will again be recreated in short order.

We MUST understand that smacking does not cause children to internalize any moral or ethical messages, nor does it encourage them to cherish freedom, embrace life and find meaning.

## The Silent Crisis – Simple Ways to Protect Children From Sexual Abuse

To date there has been no-one who has been able to offer any evidence that corporal punishment works, but there *are* countless studies that have proven that it does not work and is in fact harmful in a number of ways.

Jacques Prevert wrote, “The road to hell is paved with good intentions”.

When we smack our children, our intentions may be good, but they are not educated, they are not wise and they make no sense at all. They are based on our own fear and conditioning and until we really explore our reasons why we choose to hit our children, nothing will change. We believe unconsciously; therefore we choose unconsciously.

Rationalization one: “If parents do not use smacking as a means to control their children then children will run amok”. This argument is a clear indication that parents have not explored other alternatives, nor have they even explored their own choice to smack their children as that argument is easily overcome. If we argued that children who are not smacked become out of control and anti-social, we must also acknowledge, that if recent polls suggest, that 94% of parents smack their children, then only 6% of children should be unruly. Is that true? If smacking worked, then you should only ever need to smack your child...what...three or four times, and then they would not misbehave. Is that true?

Permissiveness can also be unwise and counterproductive. The wise parent establishes a safe environment with age-appropriate boundaries and reasonable rules, models desirable behaviours, and appeals to and cultivates the child’s natural inclination toward imitation and cooperation. This method takes more skill and patience than hitting, but it works. It strengthens the bonds of trust between parent and child, between teacher and learner, thus paving the way for the more challenging lessons ahead.

Rationalization two: “Children under five cannot be reasoned with and so need a smack so they will understand”. Is that true? Lets look at this another way. Imagine you were a visiting a foreign country, you were learning the language, but were not proficient at speaking it yet and you didn’t fully understand the customs there. Now imagine you did something inappropriate and the people in charge thought the only way you would understand and learn was to hit you. Even though you were trying your absolute best to do the right thing, sometimes you just didn’t understand and as they shouted at you in their language you understood most of what they said, but you could not speak the language well enough to argue your point or to make them understand that you were trying your best and you didn’t mean to upset anyone– well this is what it is like for your child under five.

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Children should never receive less protection than adults we must put an end to adult justification of violence against children, whether accepted as 'tradition' or disguised as 'discipline'. A child is a fully fledged human being deserving of the same rights and protection as any other member of society.

Any form of corporal punishment or 'smacking' is a violent attack upon another human being's integrity.

Rationalization three : "I was smacked and it never did me any harm" – That may be true, but imagine for a moment if you had been raised under the understanding that you were perfect the way you are.

Children lose control sometimes; they are born with an incredible array of emotions which they need to learn how to control. When they do lose control, our job is to help them to discover ways to exercise restraint and self-discipline, to acknowledge their inner world and to consciously make sense of those feelings and manage them effectively. A fully functioning, perfectly attended tool to guide us in life is a gift we are equipped with, from birth. This is our emotional guidance system. Feelings are our first and purest thought and are the language of the soul. When we smack our children for expressing their feelings, no matter how inappropriate or socially unacceptable, we deny them the opportunity to learn self-control and acceptance. By working out solutions and resolving conflicts in a constructive, compassionate and non-violent manner, you show respect and faith in their ability to deal with difficult emotional issues in the future. In other words, learn to trust your child, so they can learn to trust in themselves.

"When a child, no matter how old, feels our acceptance, when he feels our love, not just for his easy-to-live-with, lovable, attractive self, but also for his difficult, repulsive, exasperating self, it feeds him and frees him to become more balanced and whole". (Kabat-Zinn, M. *The Inner Work of Mindful Parenting*.)

Everyone agrees that love is wonderful; in fact most of us spend our whole life seeking it along with approval and appreciation. Imagine if we received all the love, approval and appreciation of our parents when we were children. We seek what we feel we lack. The greatest gift we can give our children is our unconditional love.

When we give children a strong foundation of emotional wellbeing they can go on to achieve anything they desire and will seek out the experiences and knowledge that will allow them to achieve their goals and dreams and anything they desire.

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Our world, the only world we have and the future of our species is in dire straits. Global warming, war, terrorism, and depression threaten the foundation of our human experience, yet we still *refuse* to consider change. There are children all over this world of *ours* that are suffering in the most horrific ways. If you could, just for one minute put your pride and prejudice aside and consider change. A world free from war, rape, child sexual abuse, terrorism, hate, intolerance, greed, violence and fear starts in your home. Violence breeds violence and smacking your child IS violence. Consider this – if your spouse smacked you, how would you feel? What would that do to your relationship? If your boss smacked you, how would you feel? If your best friend smacked you, what would that do to your relationship? How would you feel? Why do you think that smacking your child is any different? They are fully fledged human beings, deserving of the same rights of respect, safety and protection as you are. They are more emotionally vulnerable than you, less able to make sense of such violence and more defenceless and exposed to the hurt.

Children are like mirrors to us, reflecting back the very things we hate about ourselves. Imagine if you felt proud, strong and in control. So would your children.

They will do what you do, not necessarily what you say. They learn through imitation, so if you don't like the way your children are behaving, look at yourself, for that is where the answers often lie.

The education of children needs to radically change, and the new curriculum should consist of subjects such as tolerance, non-violent conflict resolution, non-violent parenting, ethical economics, spirituality, religious diversity, freedom, environmental conservation and compassion. They should learn how to guide their thoughts on purpose – offering their thoughts deliberately to become creators of their own experience, the managers of their own thoughts and lives.

Smacking does nothing to help achieve these goals.

We can guide children to develop a positive perception of themselves and the world around them through being an example ourselves. In the way that we choose to live and in the thoughts, words, and deeds by which we conduct *our* lives. They will experience positive and negative things in their world and our role is to gently remind them how to effectively manage their emotions for the good of all. We can teach our children to be the alchemist of their lives and of our own.

William James the founder of the field of psychology in the United States said that the most important discovery of his time was that you could change the quality of your life, by changing the quality of your thoughts.

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Our relationship with our children is one of the most wonderful examples of love that we can experience in our life time. It can also be an incredible catalyst for growth and happiness, but only if we let it.

The greatest obstacle to solving the problems that plague our world is our refusal to consider change.

When we justify violence against our most vulnerable, for any reason, it begs us to question why? At the end of the day, this is about treating children with dignity and respect, it is about their basic rights as human beings, it is about love and it is about ourselves. Our ability to nurture, respect, love, discipline and protect our children is a reflection of how we manage ourselves.

This recent “anti-smacking” debate made me realize that we have further to travel than I first realised.

It is not about being a perfect parent. There is no such thing. We are all learners and the key is to never stop learning and to never stop questioning ourselves as parents and as human beings. Every time a mother decides to explain respectfully the consequences of her child’s actions instead of hitting him, or when she apologises for an angry outburst or when she responds lovingly to her baby’s cries instead of letting him “cry it out” or when she overcomes her own neediness and childhood traumas and gives her child all the love and nurturance that she herself did not receive, a revolution begins to occur. Every time a father decides to be loving, attentive and actively involved with the rearing of his children, our culture evolves another step.

Adults must learn humility - listening to children, to their ideas, their fantasies, and their fears.

Children are acute observers; and we must learn to trust them more. And we must not only listen to our children, we must also hear what they say.

Choose to be part of the revolution and the evolution of our society and of our world. Moving forward towards a world in which violence against children is socially unacceptable and legally outlawed - towards a world in which children will no longer be afraid and hurt and in which, we are truly deserving of the gratitude of our children.

This is something worth striving for.