

Parenting Challenges: Hitting is not educating!



CONTENTS

Introduction

Corporal punishment: a trapped “educational and pedagogical”
strategy 4

How do we know what corporal punishment is 5

 Definition of corporal punishment and prevalence of its use 5

 Legal aspects 8

 Why is it still used 10

 Consequences for children 12

 Educating without hitting 15

Conscious parenting: What strategies 21

Parental burnout 43

Warning signs 47

Further information and resources 49

Bibliography 50

Technical information 54

Corporal punishment: A trapped “educational and pedagogical” strategy.



Hi everyone! I'm here to explore a topic with you that's still controversial... corporal punishment of children, like me!

The Instituto de Apoio à Criança in Portugal (The Child Support Institute) launched the campaign “No more spanking: For the elimination of corporal punishment” on February 22nd, 2022, to increase social awareness and vigilance, and fighting violence against children, with particular focus on corporal punishment.

In this booklet, we'll cover topics related to corporal punishment, such as its prevalence, its banning, the characteristics of adults who use it, why they do so, and better parental alternatives for educating and disciplining children.

Join me on this journey towards positive, conscious, and non-violent parenting, as we deconstruct corporal punishment and contribute to my and every other child's right to protection, dignity, and safety.

So how do we know what corporal punishments are?

The United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child defines corporal punishment as:

“Any punishment in which physical force is used and intended to cause some degree of pain or discomfort, however light.”

The most common corporal punishments involve hitting (spanking, slapping, beating) a child, with a hand or an object – whip, stick, belt, slipper, wooden spoon, etc. But they can also consist of, for example, kicking, shaking, or throwing a child, scratching, pinching, biting, hair pulling, ear pulling, forcing him/her into uncomfortable positions, burning, scalding, or forced ingestion (e.g., washing a child’s mouth with soap or forcing him/her to swallow spices).



**These punishments seem very similar to physical abuse...
Aren't they the same thing?**



Distinguishing corporal punishment from physical abuse can be a complex task. However, the characteristics that distinguish them are simpler than it seems: the intention with which the punishments are used, and the physical force applied.

This means that while physical punishment has the intention of punishing and/or disciplining the child, causing pain or slight discomfort, physical abuse involves intentionally inflicting physical force against a child that can, very likely, be detrimental to his/ /her health, survival, development, or dignity. This includes hitting, beating, kicking, shaking, biting, strangling, scalding, burning, poisoning, and suffocating.

But... there doesn't seem to be much difference between the two...

It's true, and according to the World Health Organization and the International Society for the Prevention of Child Abuse and Neglect, most physical violence used at home against children is inflicted with the goal of punishing them and is, therefore, difficult to distinguish when it's abuse or corporal punishment because the line between the two is blurred. Also, when applied, the parents' or caregivers' emotional state is altered, which affects their behavior.

Maybe they shouldn't be used at all. How many children around the world endure this type of punishment?

Now that we know what corporal punishments are... are they really used frequently all around the world?

According to the World Health Organization and UNICEF, **6 out of every 10 children (1 billion) around the world**, between the ages of 2 and 14 years old are subjected to corporal punishments by their caregivers daily. There are other frightening facts in addition to this one... For example, **17% of children have experienced severe physical punishments**, which include being hit on the head, face, and ears, or receiving violent and repeated blows.

Another worrying statistic relates to the age of the children who endure these punishments: **younger children, between the ages of 2 and 4 years old, are just as likely to receive severe corporal punishments as older children, between the ages of 5 and 14**. Also, **3 in 10 babies between 12 and 23 months are punished with repeated spankings** (i.e., hitting).



I can't believe that so many children endure these punishments from people who are supposed to protect them... What is being done to prevent them from still being used?



It's important that we know which path to take to ban corporal punishments, especially because by prohibiting them we are:

- | Ensuring that children are equally protected by the law.
- | Ensuring our rights as children, respect for human dignity, and physical integrity.
- | Limiting the use of the most common form of violence against children around the world.
- | Alerting to and potentially minimizing negative effects on our development.
- | Encouraging the reduction of all forms of violence against children, and perhaps even reducing violence in society in general.

Now that we know the benefits of banning physical punishment, what efforts are different countries making to achieve it?

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child was the first document to highlight the importance of providing children with a safe and violence-free life, urging parties to protect children from all forms of violence.

And so, collective efforts have been made to achieve this protection. Since then, 63 States have banned all forms of corporal punishment of children.

Sweden was the first country to prohibit all types of corporal punishment of children in 1979, while currently 26 States (e.g., China, Mexico, Mozambique) have committed to reformulating their legislation to completely prohibit corporal punishment.

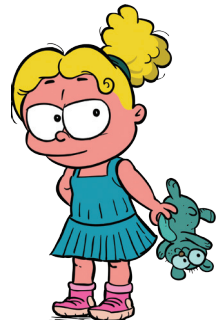
And in Portugal? What efforts have been made since?

In 2007, Portugal became one of the countries that prohibit corporal punishment, including in domestic environments. This measure contributed to ensuring that 1,782,000 children were protected by law from corporal punishment by 2022.

This means that all children are now protected before the law, right?

Not entirely, because in too many countries the law still does not prohibit physical punishment of children or even explicitly authorizes its use and establishes details of how to inflict it. Therefore, there's still a long way to go, considering that only 14% of children and young people around the world are fully protected by law against all forms of corporal punishment.

So, it's important to raise awareness among decision-makers, the general population, and parents and caregivers, specifically, about the effects that these punishments have on children like me...



Even though we must try harder, it's good to know that some countries, like mine, are committed to making me feel safer and more protected, especially with my parents or caregivers. But are my parents or caregivers some of those who continue to use corporal punishment?



If corporal punishment is prohibited, why do parents and caregivers continue to use it?

Adults tend to continue using corporal punishment for two main reasons:

- Due to the beliefs they have about them and the meaning they attribute to them, for example, hitting children is for their own good, it's effective in stopping "bad behavior" or tantrums and if it's light spanking it's ok.
- Due to memories and experiences they had as children, having been punished by their own parents. Since their parents hit them, when they grow up, they believe that it's a legitimate, acceptable, harmless, and effective way of educating their own children.

But do all parents and caregivers who suffered physical punishment during their childhood think this way?

Not always! Sometimes, parents who have experienced them decide in a conscious and informed way that this isn't the way or approach they want to use to educate their children, because they know what

the implications are for their children's development and because they're aware of other strategies and better alternatives for their education.

So, what about the children? Are they all corporal punished to the same extent?

No, not all children are corporally punished to the same extent, it's more common in children between 18 months and 5 years old. Although older children and adolescents are also punished with some frequency, it's between those ages that children suffer more corporal punishments. Furthermore, boys are also more punished in comparison to girls. Plus, children who are considered to have "difficult," inappropriate, defiant, coercive, and/or antisocial behaviors are punished more frequently and more severely.



I'm starting to get worried... What if my parents or caregivers continue to use corporal punishment? What could happen to me?



We already know how many children endure these punishments, and what factors encourage their use... What about the consequences for the children?

According to several studies, the use of corporal punishment causes children to:

- Be at greater risk of being seriously assaulted, physically abused, and suffering an injury that requires medical attention.
- As babies, suffer from "Shaken Baby Syndrome," consisting of violently shaking them to stop their crying, which can cause physical and neurological damage (e.g., bruising, inflammation and cerebral hemorrhage, convulsions, and cognitive impairment) in the short and long-term.
- Have their physiological functions compromised due to prolonged exposure to these types of experiences, which contributes to high levels of inflammation.
- Manifest more learning difficulties, aggressive and antisocial behaviors, disobedience, opposition, and defiance.
- Present lower cognitive capacity, self-esteem, self-concept, and emotional regulation, as well as lower grades.
- Have a less affectionate, close, and secure relationship with their caregivers, sometimes maintaining this pattern into adolescence and adulthood.
- Learn that the use of physical violence is an acceptable way to solve conflicts and problems.

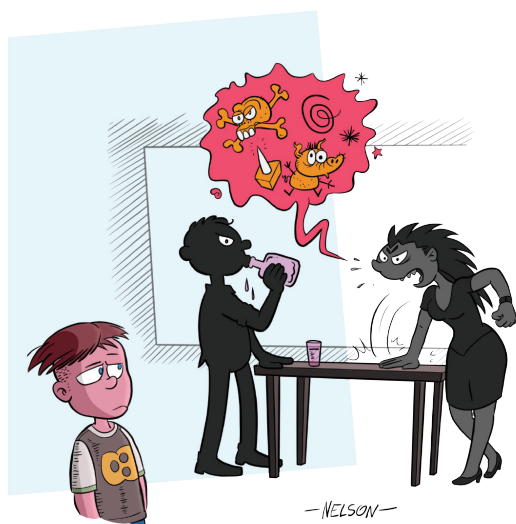
But if physical punishments have so many negative consequences, why do adults still use them? Do they have positive consequences that we're unaware of?

No positive consequences associated with their use have been discovered to date... Furthermore, corporal punishment doesn't help children stop inappropriate behaviors quickly, as research indicates that even after being physically punished, children continue to engage in the same behaviors for which they were punished, repeating them up to ten minutes later. **This indicates that not only are corporal punishments dangerous for children, but they also aren't effective at all.**



It seems to me that corporal punishment is not only dangerous for children but also not at all effective... But does it help us to become better adults in the long run?

No, on the contrary... **it's been proven that corporal punishment has negative and even harmful effects on children in the long-term, affecting several areas in adulthood.** For example, they affect the quality of the parent-child relationship and the parenting of the person who experienced it in childhood, they reduce the internalization of values and rules, and they compromise mental health, emotional regulation, learning, and development in general.



And in adulthood, they can contribute to and even enhance aggressiveness, delinquency, criminal and antisocial behavior, risky behaviors, problematic and excessive use of alcohol, drug addiction, and child abuse. Additionally, it increases the likelihood of becoming a victim of physical or domestic violence in the future.

I can't understand how this "educational strategy," as adults call it, continues to be used... Aren't there better alternatives to punishing children in such a violent way?

There are two alternatives, actually: conscious parenting and discipline and education.

Conscious and positive parenting is an educational approach that promotes a relationship between parents/caregivers and children based on affection, mutual respect, promotion of children's development, and on the ability to negotiate different interests in a non-violent and constructive way.

Conscious and positive discipline is a non-violent educational and disciplinary approach that creates a relationship of mutual respect with the child, and is based on the principles of child development, on developing the child's self-discipline/control, and child's long-term competence and confidence.

But do these approaches mean we can do anything we want? And that parents/caregivers can't discipline us?

Not at all! These approaches are not the same as permissive parenting, where children aren't monitored or disciplined, and educated. And it doesn't mean that parents should allow the child to do whatever they want, not establishing rules, limits, or expectations for their behavior.





These are simply child-centered approaches that put their needs first and seek to help them control their own behavior, leading them to act in accordance with what they consider right or wrong, with the support of parents and caregivers.

And why are these strategies better than physical punishment?

They're better because they have long-term benefits for children, such as:

- Improved mental health and emotional well-being, physiological development and functioning, social adjustment and competence, academic performance, and self-regulation capacity, as well as contributing to fewer behavior and conduct issues.
- Furthermore, they help to distinguish right from wrong and teach that when mistakes are made or we're faced with problems, there's always a solution, even when the caregiver isn't present while teaching how to solve conflicts in a non-violent way.

And how can parents and caregivers apply these approaches to our education?

Using these approaches implies that you, as a parent or caregiver, are able to:

- | Empathize with me.
- | Understand and consider my point of view.
- | Be knowledgeable about my development throughout the various stages of my growth.
- | Offer me care and support.
- | Structure the situations and interactions in which I'm included to promote collaborative and cooperative behaviors, guiding my interactions so that they're constructive and positive and anticipating situations to minimize conflicts.
- | Offer me reasonable alternatives that can be negotiated.
- | Pick which behaviors of mine require your intervention.
- | Use humor and play strategically to deal with challenging behaviors I may have.
- | Explain firmly what you expect from me, the limits and rules but always offer a justification for them.
- | Praise and use positive reinforcement when I behave appropriately.





- | Validate my emotions and help me regulate them.
- | Regulate your own emotions before interacting with me.

Additionally, there are some specific strategies that you can use to help apply these approaches to my education, such as:

- | Focus on long-term not short-term goals. This means thinking about the values you want to convey to me in the long-term, in addition to the tasks you want me to do in the short-term.

For example, when it takes me a long time to get ready for school in the morning, I know that your short-term goal is to get out of the house, and you possibly start to feel frustrated and irritated because you're not fulfilling it. When this happens, you can take a moment to reflect on what you want me to learn in the long-term, rather than the short-term, seeing these moments of frustration as opportunities to teach me through example not only how I should deal with frustration and irritation, but how to be faster and more independent when going to school. And you should think of these moments as an opportunity to teach me something more important – how to manage my time, stress, and emotions.

- | **Give me a lot of affection and care** because no matter what stage of development I'm at, this behavior on your part is essential to promote a safe and affectionate relationship with me, enhancing my growth.

You can do this by showing that you like me, by playing and having fun with me, by demonstrating that I continue to deserve your love, even when I behave inappropriately or make mistakes, seeing situations from my perspective, praising me, and actively listening to me, and giving me affection and physical touch, like hugs and kisses.

| Give me structure and support, as they help me learn to solve problems, challenges, and conflicts, setting the model I'll use for the rest of my life.

You can do this by preparing me for situations that you know may be difficult for me, telling me what to expect and how to deal with them by clarifying and explaining the reasons for the rules, giving me the opportunity to debate them, negotiate and listen to my point of view, according to my developmental stage and teaching and demonstrating the effects of my actions. It's really important that you don't use threats of hitting me, depriving me of affection, monsters, or other things that I might be afraid of so that I can always trust you.

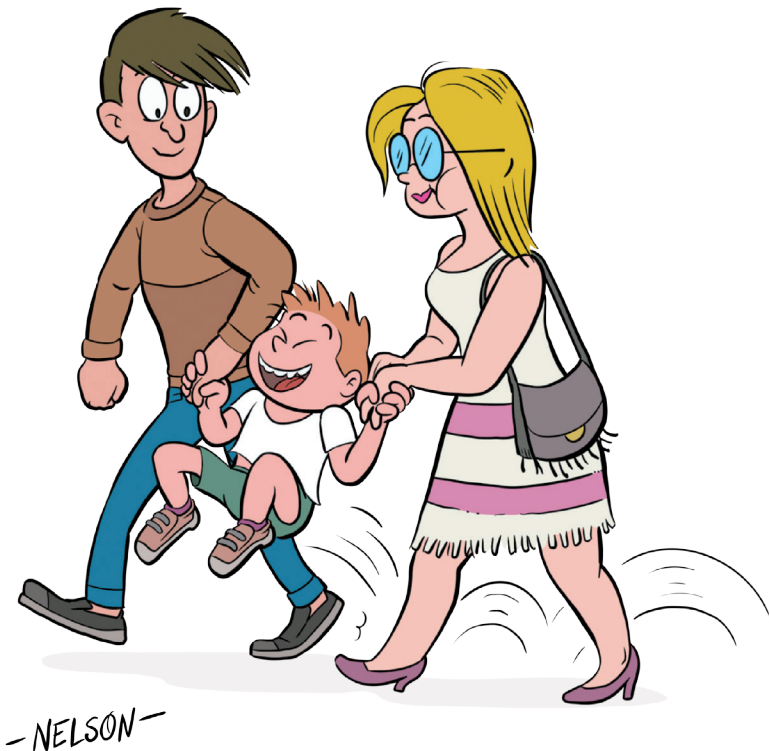
| Using consequences for my inappropriate behaviors, because it teaches me that all my behaviors have consequences for which I'm responsible.

You can do this by telling me the consequences for breaking the rules before it happens, explaining why those consequences exist for the decision I make, but letting me make the decision and accept it regardless of the consequences that it implies. However, you should not use this strategy if I'm still young or cannot understand and experience the consequences, for example until I'm 18 months old.

| Use "Time-In". I know it sounds like "Time-Out" but it's nothing like it! By using Time-In, you can have more positive and collaborative interactions with me because I'm not afraid of being punished, which means I feel less anxious and engage in less challenging behaviors compared to Time-Out.



You can do this by sitting with me after I've misbehaved, helping me to calm down and regulate emotionally while removing me from the environment that has dysregulated and confused me. When I'm younger, you can sit me on your lap and when I'm older you can sit in front of me and talk to me calmly about my behavior, touching me affectionately and letting me know you're there by my side to help me, like stroking my back, wiping my tears, and hugging me. You should then ask me how I feel, trying to identify the need that led to the poor behavior in the first place. When I'm calmer, you can tell me how I should behave in similar situations in the future, so I know what to expect and what to do when I feel this way.



So how do children feel when they're punished? And what about when they're educated in a conscious, positive, sensitive, and non-violent way?



THINK ABOUT THE FOLLOWING SITUATION

I'm little and I've been crying for about an hour, non-stop. You've tried everything to calm me down, but nothing seems to work. I'm getting more and more agitated, and I cry louder when you try to put me in my crib.



What can you do in this situation

Option A.

You start shaking me harder to try to calm me down. When that doesn't work, you put me in the crib and leave me there to calm down on my own, because you think I'm just "spoiled".

Option B.

You assess whether I might be in pain or getting sick. If that's not the case, you hold me in your arms and comfort me, rocking me lightly and speaking calmly and affectionately, because you know that you cannot "spoil a baby with cuddles".



How do I feel after your intervention

Option A.

I feel confused and insecure:

Because the person who should protect me and help me calm down causes me discomfort and fear.

Because I need your comfort, closeness, and presence and instead I'm left alone with my needs unmet.

Option B.

I feel comforted and safe:

Because you're helping me calm down, comforting me, and showing that you're there with me no matter what.

Because you maintain closeness and physical contact, and I know that my need for comfort, attention, and affection will be satisfied whenever I express that I need you.



What do I learn through your behaviors

Option A.

That it's not worth expressing my needs, in the only way I know and am capable of because you'll interpret them in the wrong way, or you won't respond to them in a sensitive or affectionate way. So, I stop crying, knowing that I can't count on my caregiver's consistent comfort.

Option B.

That whenever I need it, I can express myself through crying and you'll respond, comforting me and satisfying my needs, whether for closeness and affection, or others that I may have.



THINK ABOUT THE FOLLOWING SITUATION

I'm learning to crawl and explore the world around me and while we're playing on the floor, I see a socket on the wall. I get curious and reach out to touch it.

What can you do in this situation



Option A.

Hit my hand hard so I don't put my fingers in the socket and pick me up to move me away from there, only telling me that I can't touch it.

Option B.

Approach quickly but calmly, moving my hand away from it. Explain to me that I can't put my fingers there because I could hurt myself (in an age-appropriate way, of course). Distract me by showing me a different toy so that I lose interest in exploring that place.

How do I feel after your intervention



Option A.

I feel sad, confused, and scared:

Because I don't understand why you reacted so harshly and interrupted me abruptly without explanation.

Because I need your support as I discover the world around me, knowing which reactions I can expect from you.

Because by reacting in this way, you convey to me that the environment around me isn't safe, causing me fear and uncertainty and showing me that I should not explore it freely.



How do I feel after your intervention

Option B.

I feel calm, happy, and safe:

Because you calmly but firmly removed me from danger, without transmitting your concern and anxiety to me.

Because you explained to me why I shouldn't touch that place in a way that I can understand without generating anxiety or fear of the environment around me.

Because you distracted me with something that captures my interest, offering me a safe alternative that stimulates my exploration too.



What do I learn through your behaviors

Option A.

That the world around me is dangerous, not only because of what surrounds me but because of my caregivers' unexpected reactions. Consequently, I remain constantly on alert, so I can hide or run away at any sign of danger around me, making me feel constantly anxious and agitated.

Option B.

That I can freely explore the world around me without fear, and with the confidence that my caregiver will intervene appropriately and protect me from possible dangers, always explaining why I can't explore certain places.

So, I learn that I'm safe, that you are alert and involved in my explorations, and that I can count on you whenever I need you.



THINK ABOUT THE FOLLOWING SITUATION

It's time to go to bed and I refuse to go to sleep. This situation has been happening for a few nights and your tiredness is already unbearable. When you ask me why I don't want to go to sleep, I tell you that I've been having nightmares about a monster, and I don't want to sleep alone because I'm scared. Even so, I lie down on the bed and try to fall asleep, but after a few minutes, I get up and go to you.

What can you do in this situation



Option A.

Spank me twice and send me back to my room alone, calling me a "scaredy cat," telling me there aren't any monsters, and that I'm big and too old to fall asleep in the company of others.

Option B.

You go back to my room with me and explain to me that I have to sleep so I have energy tomorrow when I go to school. You explain to me that monsters don't exist and that nightmares aren't real, but that you're going to leave a light on at night. You tell me that you'll stay with me until I fall asleep and read me a story or cuddle with me until I fall asleep.

How do I feel after your intervention



Option A.

I feel hurt, humiliated, afraid, and rejected:

Because you physically hit me out of a fear that I can't control, since I still can't distinguish what's real from imaginary.

Because not only did you invalidate my emotions, but you also ridiculed them, calling me a "scaredy cat."

Because I have to deal with fear alone, without your closeness and comfort.



How do I feel after your intervention

Option B.

I feel emotionally validated, comforted, and safe:

Because you came back to the room with me and explained to me that even though monsters and nightmares aren't real, you understand that I'm scared and that's why you'll leave a light on so that I don't feel so scared when I wake up during the night.

Because you made me feel secure and stayed close to me while I tried to fall asleep, which made me feel safe and calm knowing that I can count on you when I feel scared.



What do I learn through your behaviors?

Option A.

That my requests for help or comfort when I feel scared can be responded to with violence or humiliation.

So, every time I feel scared, I'll hide it from you, because I know you can make the situation even scarier for me, which means I won't ask for help, even when I need it.

Option B.

That what I feel is valid, and that you're always there to make me feel safe, protected, and comforted even if, as in this case, the threat of danger isn't real.

That I can share my fears and concerns with you and you won't ridicule me for it, on the contrary, you'll explain to me what is real and what isn't.



THINK ABOUT THE FOLLOWING SITUATION

It's three in the morning and I'm calling you crying. You get to my room and realize I had a little "accident:" I wet the bed.

What can you do in this situation



Option A.

Get irritated, ignore my crying, and yell at me saying that I should let you know when I need to pee.

As punishment, you force me to sleep in the same pajamas and sheets, and you say I'm lucky you don't hit me.

Option B.

Tell me that it's normal and it happens to all children at some point in their lives, comfort me, explain that there's no problem and that we'll take care of it together. You help me clean and change my pajamas and sheets.

You ask me if I'm nervous, or anxious or if I want to share any fears I may have. After you calm me down, you sit on my bed as I fall asleep, rubbing my back.

How do I feel after your intervention



Option A.

I feel humiliated, powerless, and anguished:

Because you ignored my need for comfort and blamed me for something I still can't control.

Because you forced me to be uncomfortable, with dirty, wet, cold clothes as a form of punishment for something that's common during my development.

Because I may be dealing with an emotional challenge that manifests itself in this way and by punishing me you may be contributing to more frequent accidents.



How do I feel after your intervention

Option B.

I feel comforted, understood, and safe:

Because you comforted me physically and verbally and made it clear that it wasn't my fault and that these types of accidents are common and happen to many children.

Because you helped me solve the problem and made a point of asking me if anything was going on that could've contributed to this "accident," which makes me feel comfortable sharing my concerns with you.

Because you guaranteed a return to "normality" after a stressful situation that disorganized me.



What do I learn through your behaviors

Option A.

That I can be punished for situations over which I have no control, which makes me feel constantly alert, anxious, and cautious in my actions so as not to make mistakes.

That the person who should support me in these situations is, in fact, a stressor for me and, therefore, I should avoid them at all costs, even when I really need them.

Furthermore, I may develop more serious enuresis problems and even intensify emotional issues that already exist associated with these events.

Option B.

That I can ask you for help when I need it and you won't react with anger or frustration, even when you're tired.

That I don't need to feel ashamed when something like this happens because, as you explained to me, it's perfectly normal and can happen to anyone.

That even when accidents occur, there's always a solution and we'll find it together.



THINK OF THE FOLLOWING SITUATION

My sister and I are with you in the car. We start arguing because we both want the same toy. I get angry and hit her to make her give me the toy. She starts crying and hits me back.



What can you do in this situation

Option A.

You stop the car, get out, head to the back seat, and slap each of us. You say we can't hit each other and that when we get home, we'll both be grounded without our toys and then you take away the toy we were fighting over.

Option B.

You stop the car and talk to both of us to find out what's going on. After explaining ourselves, you say that we shouldn't hit each other because we could hurt one another and that until we decide what to do about the toy, we won't move and so it'll take longer to get home where all our toys are, and with which we can play as much as we want.

You say it's important that we learn how to share and that if we can do it together, we can resume our way home and, if we can't share between us, we'll have to give you the toy until we get home, but that it's our choice. If possible, offer us an alternative to that toy or suggest we play a game in which everyone can participate.



How do I feel after your intervention

Option A.

I feel scared, worried, and confused:

Because you beat us both so not only was I physically punished, I witnessed my sister's punishment.

Because by trying to stop our physical aggression, you show us that the way to do it is with physical aggression.

Because your reaction was unexpected, having disproportionate consequences to our behavior, given that toys are important to us and being without any is scary.

Option B.

I feel heard and in control of the situation:

Because you allowed us to explain ourselves and listened to our points of view.

Because you clarified that we have a choice, and that the decision is ours, but that there are consequences for each of the options.

You explained to us the importance of sharing and gave us alternatives, trying to distract us from the conflict.



What do I learn through your behaviors

Option A.

That violence is an acceptable way of solving problems and conflicts with others because you showed me that this is how to stop unwanted behavior.

That punishment can occur at any time, which makes me always vigilant and afraid of being beaten for any behavior I have.

That my things can be taken from me at any time and that I have an obligation to share everything with anyone who asks me to.



What do I learn through your behaviors

Option B.

That my point of view is valid and that I deserve to be heard, even when I behave inappropriately.

That violence is not a way to solve conflicts and that it can have more serious consequences.

That I have the power to choose what to do, but I have to deal with the consequences of the choices I make (e.g., if I don't share the toy, I'll have to hand it over and we won't go home and play with the rest, versus if I do share, we get home quicker and I have other toys at my disposal).



THINK OF THE FOLLOWING SITUATION

We're at my grandparents' house playing with a ball in the backyard. Suddenly, the ball is thrown far, ending up on the street in front of the house. I run out to get it, without looking both ways.



What can you do in this situation

Option A.

You run after me, grab me by the arm, and hit me three times, while you ask me screaming whether I want to get runover and die. You tell me that I'm forbidden from playing with the ball and going outside, forcing me back inside the house.

What can you do in this situation?



Option B.

You run after me, grab my arm, and tell me that I have to be careful because a lot of cars pass this street and that I have to look both ways before crossing, or ask an adult for help. I tell you that I didn't do it on purpose, and you say that you know so, but that I need to understand that it's dangerous to cross the street alone without making sure no cars are coming, teaching me to act in these situations.

You ask me if I understood that it's dangerous and if I know what to do next time and after answering that I do, you give me the ball back and tell me to be careful.

How do I feel after your intervention?



Option A.

I feel hurt, scared, and cautious:

Because you hit me for putting myself in danger, not considering that at my age I still don't understand the risks I expose myself to.

Because you tell me that I could die, which makes the environment around me frightening, making me afraid of the consequences of my actions, and limiting my active exploration.

Because you forbid me from doing something I like, without explaining to me what I should've done in this situation to avoid putting myself in danger.

Option B.

I feel protected and understood:

Because you reached me in time, before anything could happen, calmly but firmly.

Because you heard my justification and understood it, stressing that it's still important to pay attention in these situations so that I don't get hurt.

Because you made sure I knew what to do next time I'm in a similar situation, not punishing me for a mistake.



What do I learn through your behaviors

Option A.

That the world around me is dangerous, I have no idea what might be safe or not because you didn't explain to me what I should pay attention to and what might be a risk for me.

That you are part of that danger since you punished me for unintentional behavior and made the situation scary.

Option B.

That you protect me in risky/dangerous situations, maintaining a calm and reliable posture, allowing me to explain myself.

That you're available to help me when I need you and that you'll make sure that I have all the information I need to make better decisions about my actions in the future.



THINK OF THE FOLLOWING SITUATION

You notice that I spend more and more time playing video games. You start to worry that I may be "addicted" and that I'll lose interest in the rest of my daily activities, given that every time you ask me to switch it off to do homework or to go to bed, for example, an argument ensues.



What can you do in this situation

Option A.

You pull my ear and say that video games are over as of now. You yell at me, adding that you no longer trust me to decide how much time to play on the computer and, therefore, you're going to turn off the internet indefinitely.

What can you do in this situation?



Option B.

You ask me to turn off the video game so we can talk.

You tell me that you're worried I'm spending too much time gaming and that I don't seem interested in other activities.

You ask what my point of view is and if there's any reason why I spend so much time playing. After listening to my explanation, you try to come to an agreement with me on the times in which I can play, alternating them with other activities or rest. We set rules together and we post them next to my game console or computer so I know when I can play.

How do I feel after your intervention?



Option A.

I feel hurt, angry, and humiliated:

Because you punish me physically for no reason, just because you feel frustrated.

Because you set the limit without asking me my perspective or allowing me to explain myself.

Because you imply that I'm not trustworthy or capable of participating in decisions that concern me.

Option B.

I feel understood and validated:

Because you make a point of sharing your concerns and asking about my interest in video games.

Because you demonstrate flexibility and openness to combine my needs and interests with your rules and limits.

Because you allow me to keep doing something I like, as long as I'm responsible and able to follow the defined rules.



What do I learn through your behaviors

Option A.

That I can be physically punished when you feel angry or frustrated.

That I have no say over decisions that involve me since you're the one who decides when I can do what I like.

That there's no consistency in the time I'm allowed to play and, therefore, I don't learn to do it autonomously.

Because I don't know how to manage my time, I don't deserve your trust, which makes me feel a constant need to please you and comply with everything you say, restricting my autonomy and critical thinking.

Option B.

That my opinions and interests are valid and that you're interested in my well-being.

That you're open to negotiate and compromise with me, there being no need to feel wronged and angry because you allow me to do something I like within the acceptable limits agreed upon between us.

That I can express my needs and you'll listen to them and try to understand my point of view.



THINK OF THE FOLLOWING SITUATION

We're returning home after playing at the park. On the way you talk to me about tidying up my room and the toys I left scattered around once we're home. I say that I'm not going to clean up my stuff because I'm tired and I don't want to hear from you anymore.

What can you do in this situation



Option A.

Slap me and say that you're in charge, that I have to respect my elders. You tell me that if I don't clean up my toys and my room, you'll throw them all away and that you will hit me more if I don't do it as soon as I get home.

Option B.

You tell me you understand that I'm tired, but that you won't tolerate me talking to you that way. That it's important to treat people with respect, even if we're angry or frustrated, and that when we speak in this way, we should apologize for possibly hurting the other person's feelings.

You ask me why I feel tired and if something's happened that I want to share and if I need a hug or cuddle.

You reinforce that despite feeling this way, I'll have to pick up my toys, but that if I want, you can help me.

How do I feel after your intervention



Option A.

I feel hurt, humiliated, and powerless:

Because you punish me physically and impose your authority over me, giving me no room to explain or redeem myself.

Because you don't try to understand why I answered you like that, missing the opportunity to understand if something happened that made me angry or frustrated.

Because you threaten to take away all my toys, which are important to me, without me being able to do anything about it.

How do I feel after your intervention?



Option B.

I feel understood and comforted:

Because even though you set a firm and assertive boundary, you continued to validate my feelings and make it clear that you understand I'm tired.

Because you make an effort, despite being angry, to understand what could've made me respond that way.

Because you offer me physical comfort and you're available to help me, conveying that even when I behave inappropriately, I'm worthy of your love, affection, and support.

What do I learn through your behaviors?



Option A.

That your authority overrides my needs, that I have to bear the consequences of my mistakes and I have no opportunity to apologize or explain myself.

That I can't question your authority or that of other adults, having to submit to the conditions imposed on me.

That my feelings and needs, in this case, anger and tiredness, aren't valid and that I should keep them to myself.

Option B.

That I can count on your understanding, even when I'm tired and you're irritated.

That you don't stop liking me, just because I behaved "badly."

That there are appropriate ways to interact with others and express my feelings.

That there's a better way to manage my frustration and tiredness because you set that example for me through the way you responded to my inappropriate behavior.



THINK OF THE FOLLOWING SITUATION

It's my best friend's birthday and I ask you if I can go with him and other friends to a club/bar and I tell you that "everyone's" going. You tell me that I can't go even if everyone is. I accept your decision and don't mention it again. A week later I ask you if I can sleep over at another friend's house and you allow me to go. Later, you discover through photos on social media that I wasn't at that friend's house, but at the club I had asked you about before.

What can you do in this situation



Option A.

You start yelling at me saying that lying is the worst thing I could do and that you'll never trust me again.

You ground me, preventing me from going out and talking to my friends. You demand that I give you my cell phone and say that I won't get it back for as long as you remember this occurrence.

Option B.

You tell me that my safety is the most important thing to you.

You explain to me that these rules are motivated by your love and concern for my safety and the reason why you established them in the first place.

You ask me why I felt the need to lie.

You listen to my explanation and try to understand my motivation.

You clarify that there is no need to lie for me to do what I want and that, on the contrary, I should've expressed how much I really wanted to go. This way, we would've reached an agreement that was acceptable to us both.

You tell me that you understand my need for independence, but that you need to guarantee my safety. You mention that if I lie again, you won't be able to guarantee my safety and, as such, you ask that I talk to you next time and not lie again.

How do I feel after your intervention



Option A.

I feel emotionally distant, rejected, and ignored:

Because you didn't try to find out why I felt the need to lie to you.

Because I made a mistake, you say I'm not trustworthy, even though you didn't give an acceptable reason why I couldn't go out with my friends.

Because you prevent me from going out and doing something I like indefinitely, only you deciding when this punishment will be enough.

Option B.

I feel understood, accepted, and heard:

Because you made a point of explaining to me the reasons why you established this rule.

Because you tried to understand the reasons that led me to lie.

Because you validated that I may need more autonomy and independence in this developmental stage.

Because you demonstrated openness so that I can talk to you in future situations and negotiate alternatives that are comfortable and viable for both of us.

Because, instead of punishing me, you ask me not to repeat this, demonstrating that there's always a solution, even in the case of serious behaviors.

What do I learn from your behaviors



Option A.

That instead of telling you the truth, next time, I should hide my lie better to prevent you from punishing me again.

That my mistakes define my character, even when I make them because I don't have all the necessary information or an understandable explanation.

That you're the ultimate authority and you control my life, having the power to decide when and how I can be autonomous, not taking into consideration my developmental stage and needs.

What do I learn from your behaviors



Option B.

That I can tell you the truth and you'll be understanding and consider my need for independence.

That there's openness to define new limits together with you.

That the rules are not arbitrary but are intended to protect me.

That my mistakes don't define who I am, even if I shouldn't repeat them.

That my freedom is proportional to my sense of responsibility and that, therefore, I have to show you that I'm capable of understanding and complying with the set rules.



THINK OF THE FOLLOWING SITUATION

We have a rule that on weekends I can stay out later, with a midnight curfew, and always letting you know if I'm late. The stipulated time arrives and I'm still not at home. I don't answer the phone, so you don't know where I am or if anything's happened to me. Then I finally get home.

What can you do in this situation



Option A.

You slap me and say you won't tolerate this kind of disrespect and that next time I'll get locked out of the house.

That I don't know how worried you feel when I go out and don't say anything and that if I don't tell you when I'll be home late, you'll never let me go out again.

When I try to explain myself, you say you don't care, that rules are meant to be followed. You ground me and don't let me hang out with my friends.

What can you do in this situation



Option B.

You talk calmly with me, asking why I broke this rule, and listen to my explanations and point of view.

Then you explain to me why it's important that you know where I always am and ask me for the contact information of friends whom you can call when you can't reach me.

You discuss with me whether this rule still makes sense or whether we should adjust the curfew so that I have more flexibility and autonomy, guaranteeing my safety and your peace of mind.

How do I feel after your intervention



Option A.

I feel misunderstood, threatened, and humiliated:

Because you hit me, assuming that my behavior was intentional as a way of disrespecting you, not giving me the chance to explain myself.

Because you threatened me with the real consequence of being locked out of my house, which could pose a danger to my safety.

Because you don't allow flexibility to the stipulated rules or my autonomy, putting your need for control first.

Option B.

I feel heard, understood, and trusted:

Because you listened to my reasons for breaking the rule, without assuming that I just wanted to disrespect you.

Because you included me in defining a new rule that better adapts to my needs and developmental stage.

Because you showed you trusted me by believing what I told you, by adjusting my curfew, conveying to me that I'm capable of being responsible.



What do I learn from your behaviors

Option A.

That you're the authority and that there's no flexibility or dialogue.

That your needs are more important than mine, given that your concern takes precedence over my autonomy and demonstration of responsibility.

That there's no space to negotiate the imposed rules or adapt them to my constant growth and independence.

Option B.

That I can tell you anything and you'll be understanding and try to see things from my point of view.

That you don't misinterpret my reasons for breaking the rules, giving me space to explain myself.

That I learn to be responsible for my behaviors and actions.

That there's room for debate and negotiation in terms of my autonomy.

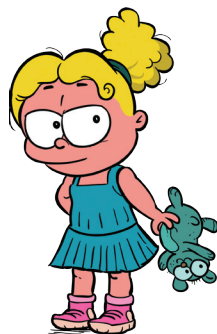
Hmm, although it seems to me that the non-violent and positive approach is the best, maybe it's not always easy to adopt it, because I know I have some behaviors that are sometimes difficult to manage...

You're right, sometimes it's not easy to adopt these strategies. The first step towards conscious and sensitive parenting is for adults to admit that they won't always be able to take care of us in a "perfect" way.

But we don't need perfect adults. We need parents and caregivers who respond to our needs, who do their best, but who are also capable of taking care of themselves.

Many adults feel pressured by society to be "exemplary" parents, to know how to manage all the tasks of parenthood, and to have answers to all the challenges they face.

But it turns out that this isn't always possible and the stress that caregivers are subject to can lead to parental burnout, that is, to a state of intense exhaustion, to emotional distancing from us, children, to constant doubt about whether they're good parents and to loss of pleasure in being with us.



So how does an adult know if they're suffering from parental burnout?



Some of the signs that parents and caregivers should be aware of are:

- | Depressive or unstable mood.
- | Anxiety or generalized fear.
- | Less emotional control.
- | Irritability.
- | Tension in relationships with others.
- | Feelings of despair, impotence, failure, and/or guilt.
- | Difficulty concentrating.
- | Increased/decreased appetite and/or sleep.
- | Dizziness or headaches.
- | Nauseousness and/or gastrointestinal disturbances.
- | Increased consumption of addictive substances (e.g., tobacco, coffee, alcohol, etc.).
- | Inability to see positive aspects of the parental role.

I've noticed that some parents may have more difficulty managing their children's behaviors, but how can this affect the care they give us?

Research tells us that parents or caregivers who suffer from parental burnout often engage in negligent and aggressive behavior toward children.

Neglect reflects parents' lack of investment in childcare and the fatigue related to the responsibilities that such care requires.

On the other hand, aggressive behaviors highlight parents' inability to regulate their own emotions, being a way for them to "relieve" their frustrations and stress.



But then what can adults do to overcome these difficulties and educate and care for us in the best way possible?



Adults must learn and practice self-care strategies so that the stress and worries related to parenthood do not negatively affect our well-being and that of our families.

They can do this in several ways:

- | Investing in meaningful relationships, that is, seeking support from other people, sharing openly, without guilt or shame, their feelings, and experiences.
- | Promoting personal well-being through a healthy lifestyle, taking time to reflect and do activities that make them feel fulfilled and go beyond their role as parents.
- | Finding purpose, that is, setting achievable personal goals and working towards attaining them or looking for opportunities for growth in areas of life in which they're invested.
- | Maintaining healthy thoughts, positively reinforcing the effort they make, remembering that there are situations that can't be controlled, but the way they react to them can, and focusing on aspects that can be changed, readjusting daily life as needed.
- | Asking for professional help and resorting to therapy to become more resilient, outlining strategies to overcome problems, and developing resources to deal with challenging situations.

Parents/caregivers, don't feel guilty about taking care of yourselves and don't be ashamed to ask for help. For us, that's what makes you the best parents we could possibly have!

But, after everything we've discussed, how can adults see that we're being physically punished when we have no visible marks?

In these situations, the adults who interact with us must pay attention to our behaviors and the signs we show, such as:

- | Sadness.
- | Isolation.
- | Anxiety.
- | Enuresis.
- | Changes in eating behavior.
- | Low self-esteem.
- | Passivity.
- | Aggression in interactions and conflict solving.
- | Restlessness or distraction.
- | Low grades.
- | Showing situations of corporal punishment during play.
- | Talk which emphasizes this sort of punishment.
- | Showing fear or resentment of parents/caregivers.
- | Lying to avoid punishment.
- | Difficulty expressing emotions.





You should talk to us to understand what's going on since these signs aren't always exclusive to corporal punishments. We may be going through another difficult situation and need your help!

What if, even after raising awareness and warning about physical punishment, we find out about a child who needs help because they're subjected to this

type of punishment? Is there anything we can do?

Yes! No child should be subjected to violence and, therefore, it's important that you adults take the initiative to inform the competent authorities. Some examples of entities that can help are*:

- | Instituto de Apoio à Criança (Child Support Institute, Portugal).
- | School.
- | Student and Family Support Office in schools (*Gabinete de Apoio ao Aluno e à Família* – GAAF in Portugal).
- | Health care facilities.
- | Family Support and Parental Counselling Centre (*Centro de Apoio Familiar e Aconselhamento Parental* – CAFAP in Portugal).
- | Portuguese Victim Support Association (APAV).
- | National Commission for the Promotion of the Rights and the Protection of Children and Young People (CNPDPCJ, in Portugal),
- | Local Commissions for the Protection of Children and Young People (CPCJ, in Portugal).

In addition to telling an adult we trust, we can also ask professionals for help.

That's why it's important that parents, educators, teachers or other adults talk to us about these issues and give us age-appropriate information so that we know how to protect ourselves and who we can turn to.

*Note: These are Portuguese organisations that work to promote and defend children's rights and intervene, among others, in situations related to corporal punishments. Other countries have similar entities that might help children and adults regarding this matter.

Further information and resources



Campaign “No more spanking!”



Research report “Does a spanking solve the problem?”: What society thinks about corporal punishment [in Portuguese]: <https://iacrianca.pt/wp-content/uploads/relatorio-investigacao-iac-4-digital.pdf>



Brochure “Attachment and Parenting” [in English]: <https://iacrianca.pt/wp-content/uploads/brochura-vinculacao-parental-final-ingles.pdf>



Conference Proceedings of the 1st “Not One More Spanking” Meeting [in Portuguese]: <https://iacrianca.pt/wp-content/uploads/atas-encontro-nem-mais-uma-palmada-final.pdf>



Conference Proceedings of the 2nd “Corporal Punishment Never Again” Meeting [in Portuguese]: <https://iacrianca.pt/wp-content/uploads/atas-encontro-nem-mais-uma-palmada-ii.pdf>



InfoCedi No. 62 [in Portuguese]: <https://iacrianca.pt/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/infocedi62.pdf>



InfoCriança No. 95 [in Portuguese]: <https://mailchi.mp/iacrianca/infocrianca95>



Conhecimento em Dia No. 22 [in Portuguese]: <https://iacrianca.pt/wp-content/uploads/22.-Conhecimento-em-Dia-n.o22-Abril-2022.pdf>

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