

Spank or Not Spank

I am no stranger to spanking. My parents used it judiciously and sparingly in raising us and I had no compunction against using it as I was raising my youngsters when I felt it was needed. As time continued, I started having problems with its effectiveness. My two oldest boys were 3 & 4 and constantly in each other's face, especially at bedtime. I would administer swats to break it up and quiet them down for bedtime. It was decreasingly effective and my frustrations increased as did the power of the swats. I wanted them to know this was serious and I was serious. I was involved in ineffective parenting at the least, and at the worst...?

This drove me to some research. I learned that spanking is measured violence. Some may feel it was justifiable violence, but there is no separating it from the fact that spanking is a violence that enforces a will. As a police officer, I was accustomed to using justifiable violence to enforce the will of law.

What happens though is that children are imprinted with the message that violence is acceptable as long as the person delivering the violence is convinced of their righteous position. It also puts a different understanding of the power relationships between parent and child. "I am to be respected because I can swat."

I found a wonderful, little known book that saved me: "The One-Minute Discipline". It was written by John Blanchard who is famous for his later book "The One-Minute Manager"

I learned that from a child's perspective, we, parents already possess the bigger grander position. To just get a feel of it, try talking to another adult from your knees and looking up. We forget how big and imposing we appear to our children. I also learned that like most parents, I punished until I saw a reaction from my child that they felt punished. Those with strong-willed children can testify that you could take a 2x4 to them before they would acknowledge any punishment or pain.

Blanchard taught me how to administer the 1-minute scolding instead of a spanking. It was not to be used for smaller level disciplines, but only for those serious moments that we thought justified a spanking. The whole discipline takes no longer than 1-minute. It involves the parent in a standing position taking hold of the child firmly by the shoulders so that they feel the firmness of the hold. In a

measured profound firm voice (not shouting, not timid) you explain the serious misbehavior that needs to be corrected. A short explanation of the natural consequences (someone could get hurt, something could be damaged, etc). Never use name calling (What's wrong with you? Stupid, etc.)

Once you said what needed to be said about the serious misbehavior (10-20 seconds), the parent gets down on their knees and embraces the child & lets them know that they are loved and that the parent wishes their safety. Do not add any more negative comments about the situation. The whole process takes place in 1 minute. To make it longer detracts from the emotional experience. As soon as the parent's position is communicated clearly...no more nagging!!! Nagging only allows the child to feel like they are the victim.

The faith in this is that we know that, whether the child exhibits it or not, they were impacted by this big grown-up taking hold and firmly scolding. Whether the child exhibits it or not, they also experience the parent's unconditional love.

As soon as the flow of emotion settles, the parent may move into corrective actions. There are strategies: what are appropriate punishments, learning tasks, etc. Remember the word discipline comes from root words involving learning (disciple, discipline of medicine, etc), not punishment.

I tried it having nothing better to offer. My steel-willed boys never showed they were impacted by it at first. The behavior though immediately changed for the better, but they were still poker-faced...at first. As time went on, they would share sorrow with my scolding, and hug me back hard during the affirmation. I used the 1-minute scolding sparingly so as to not sap it of its power. I never spanked those two boys again. I don't even think they rec'd a 1-minute scolding after a year of judicious use.

I never spanked the next two youngest boys (not because I didn't want to strangle them!!). The one had only a couple 1-minute scoldings and the 4th was a pretty compliant child that never pushed me to such profound lengths.

It worked!! My boys respect me in my fatherly position. They learned that although violence may be necessary for defense of self or others, it is not a tool for enforcing one's will. They know whatever

what, my love for them is unconditional and forever.

This is my offering to you. It has saved me, my wife, and my children much heartache (and aching butts and hands).