

Statement on Corporal Punishment

The New York Chapter of the American Professional Society on the Abuse of Children, the New York State American Academy of Pediatrics, a Coalition of Chapters 1, 2 and 3, The New York Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children, The New York Foundling, and Prevent Child Abuse New York are committed to ending child maltreatment in New York State. A critical step in ending one form of child maltreatment, physical abuse, is to reduce all forms of corporal punishment and physical discipline of children in all environments. Corporal punishment is defined as “the use of physical force with the intention of causing a child to experience pain, but not injury, for the purpose of correcting or controlling the child’s behavior.” It is often referred to as spanking, swatting, whipping, popping, smacking, slapping or paddling—all of which are behaviors used in the name of child discipline. Studies show that corporal punishment is very common in the United States. In about 50% of families, corporal punishment is used to discipline children even as young as 1-1/2 years old.

Consistent with other research, a major Canadian study found that nearly three quarters of all cases of “substantiated physical abuse” began as physical punishment. Young children who experience corporal punishment are at a greater risk of Child Protective Service involvement. Additionally, corporal punishment is related to a host of negative outcomes for children, including risk for child behavioral problems such as increased aggression, antisocial behavior and parent/child difficulties. No studies have shown that corporal punishment has positive effects on children or leads to improved child behavior. Given the current research regarding the primary and secondary negative outcomes associated with corporal punishment and the increased risk of physical abuse, our organizations oppose the hitting of children for disciplinary, or any other, purposes.

The use of corporal punishment varies by culture, nationality, race and ethnicity; however, there is a growing worldwide movement to end corporal punishment. As of 2/5/2019, 54 countries worldwide have prohibited all corporal punishment of children and at least 56 more countries expressed a commitment to full prohibition (For the most current list, see: <http://www.endcorporalpunishment.org>). Society agrees that hitting family members other than children, as well as hitting acquaintances and strangers, is considered assault and a crime. It is our belief, that children too, have the same right to be protected from hitting as do adults.

Building upon both a national and international movement to end all forms of corporal punishment in all settings, we are requesting that your agency will:

- 1) Support our effort to reduce corporal punishment.
- 2) Provide professionals who work with parents and families with suggestions for positive parenting approaches that use non-physical forms of child guidance. Examples include teaching children limit setting, self-regulation, and respect for self and others. Many of these are described in the “No Hit Zone” information in this email.
- 3) Inform parents, caregivers and the general public about the harmful effects of corporal punishment and alternative disciplinary strategies.