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Punishment without spanking

By **Katia Hetter**, Special to CNN
updated 2:12 PM EST, Tue November 8, 2011

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A mother spansks her little boy with a shoe in 1891. Parents have different ideas about punishment in 2011.

STORY HIGHLIGHTS

Parents may struggle with ways of teaching respect, values and appropriate behavior

Practice and consistency is essential to nonviolent correction

Reward system may work better than punishment

(CNN) -- Noël Plummer can't imagine making a conscious decision to inflict physical pain on her 8-year-old daughter as a punishment. She's only slapped her daughter once, without thinking, when her then-5-year-old was having an enormous tantrum.

She's never hit her again.

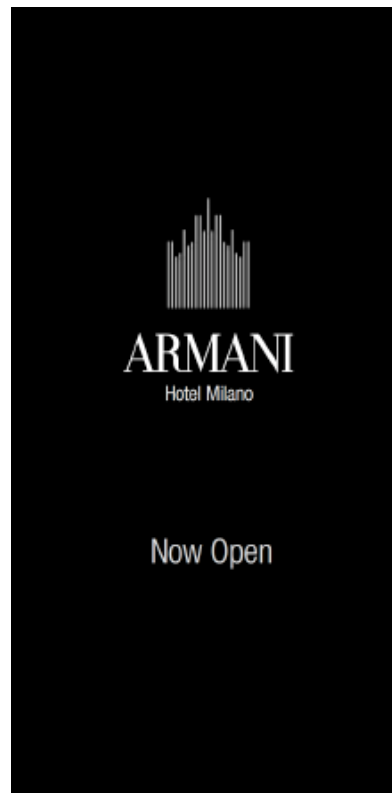
While she recognizes that physical punishment may encourage immediate fear-based compliance, "I'm interested in my child respecting my authority and decisions, and adopting my values about appropriate behavior," says Plummer, an attorney living in Albany, California. "When I discipline my child, I am teaching her how to behave appropriately."

That's why Plummer uses a rewards system for positive behaviors and regular "time-ins" where she gives her daughter her undivided attention. She also decides what behavior she wants and gives her daughter advanced notice of what to expect -- no surprises in her home.

"It's getting late," she'll tell her daughter in the car. "When we get home, I want you to brush your teeth and get into your pajamas. If you're done in 15 minutes, I will read to you. If not, I won't be able to read to you tonight."

Just like practicing a musical instrument or practicing the backstroke over and over in advance of a performance or competition, teaching our children to behave properly in a variety of situations takes preparation on our part and practice, practice, practice.

Here are some suggestions to get started.



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Decide what you want.

Before your child throws a tantrum in the grocery store or breaks a treasured vase, choose the positive behavior you want to cultivate rather than the negative behavior you want to prevent or punish.

Unless you decide to teach that positive behavior -- good manners at the grocery store or handling delicate things with care -- your child will always return to the negative behavior, says [Dr. Alan Kazdin](#), professor psychology and child psychiatry at Yale University, director of the [Yale Parenting Center](#) and author of "The Kazdin Method for Parenting the Defiant Child."

Practice makes perfect.

Once you decide what behaviors you want to cultivate in younger children, play a game of make believe to train them how to behave positively.

It can take anywhere from one to three weeks of practicing the new behavior once a day as a game, but Kazdin says the new behavior will replace the old one. After you praise them effusively and specifically for the good behavior, hug or otherwise touch your child (a teenager may only accept a high-five or thumbs up).

"You have to practice it a little bit, just like the guy (Capt. Chesley Sullenberger) landing the plane in the Hudson," says Kazdin. "Can you imagine someone saying to him, 'There's no need to practice in the simulator'? You have to get this behavior into your child's body, and then it gets into his mind."

Praise the good behavior.

Praise your children making good decisions and acting the way you want. Is your middle-school child actually telling you about a bad day? Say you appreciate her talking to you about her rough day before launching into suggesting a quick fix. Did your toddler put away his toys when asked? Praise him specifically for doing so. Does your kid like to get mail? Send a card telling them you appreciated that he's learned to do his own laundry.

"We try to acknowledge and recognize when the boys do something right, no matter how trivial, rather than always focus on the negative and disciplining," says Erik Botsford, a stay-at-home father of twin boys, age 3. "If the kids are sharing a toy, we always make a point to say 'that's great sharing.' It's regular positive reinforcement of cooperative or positive behavior."

"Time in" is necessary.

The "time out" method popular with parents who don't believe in corporal punishment won't be effective in the long-term if there's no "time in."

"We believe in a lot of talking with our son, and especially a lot of listening to his point of view, and his reasons for doing things," says [Andrew Grogan-Kaylor](#), a professor at the University of Michigan School of Social Work, whose son is 12 years old. "So far that's worked out very well for us. Parents need to keep in mind that the investments that they make in their children in terms of love, emotional warmth and time spent with their children have powerful positive effects on child behavior."

Calm down.

Your child has broken your grandmother's antique rocking chair, and you're so angry you could spit fire.

Unless your child is in harm's way, don't parent while angry (at your



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child's behavior or anything else).

Unless you want your child to learn to make quick decisions while furious, take a minute to calm down. Taking deep cleansing breaths might do the trick, or perhaps a quick relaxation exercise, says [Dr. Robert Epstein](#), a research psychologist and author, former editor of Psychology Today and father of six children.

"Even just waiting a few minutes can help, because intense emotions usually subside on their own fairly quickly," says Epstein, who developed the Epstein Parenting Competencies Inventory test of parenting skills, available at [MyParentingSkills.com](#). "A parent should never let anger guide his or her parenting. A single slap, insult or shriek can be traumatic for a child and also cause serious damage to the relationship between parent and child."

Know your kid.

Some children act out even more in response to time-outs. Others are happy for the alone time. Knowing what works for your child is key because it may be different than any parenting book's recommendation. Some kids love time-out so would seek it out. Others hate it and would behave even more defiantly.

For Crissi Dillon of Petaluma, California, the most effective punishment she's used for her 13-year-old daughter and 10-year-old son is to give them an extra chore when either of them misbehaves.

"Neither of them like cleaning but respond to this form of discipline better than having their things taken away," says Dillon, moderator and blogger for [SantaRosaMom.com](#), the parenting blog for the Press Democrat newspaper.

"It helps them to work out the anger they are feeling as they are working. And when they've finished the job, they're done with their punishment. If the job is only half done, they have to do it again."

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krishersh



Every parent I know who doesn't spank is currently raising untamed brats. They count to them constantly while the child just grins and continues on. GOOD GRIEF! I was spanked as

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a kid - not often, but when I did something pretty bad. Everything was explained on a level I understood. "You did this. W... [more](#)

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BlessedGeek

Don't you think that people who "grew up just fine" despite being spanked and yanked as kids, would also have grown up just as fine without the spanking and yanking? If so, are we a society who masochistically prefers physical pain? No pain no gain? Some people boast that their granpa smoked and smok... [more](#)

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str1249

No.

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ambotlang

It is a fact that millions of dollars are spent by school district in the US schools districts to maintain order and discipline inside the schools. This is because kids in the US are so disrespectful, so unruly and do not have enough self-discipline. It is also a fact that kids from china, singapo... [more](#)

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Guest

you cannot compare a boss with a child poor reasoning

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wendon

I'm guessing that most of the parents bragging about never spanking their children have no doubt been struck by their own children. So, as a matter of fact, you are being trained by your children to let them have their way and they are the ones in control. Is it any wonder that when they go to schoo... [more](#)

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Serene1111

Whats up with all the spanking articles CNN? This is like the 3rd one.

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nblock

Thanks for the good ideas about what to do instead of corporal punishment. Almost all researchers have found corporal punishment to be harmful. It might stop misbehavior for the moment but it doesn't teach children what to do. Children agree that it is harmful and many other strategies work bette... [more](#)

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krishersh

Wait... CHILDREN agree that they don't like to be spanked? Imagine that. THEY say other strategies work better? In who's eyes? Theirs? Or the society around them? Kids are out of control heathens nowadays. The problems lies in the parenting.

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Hadenuffyet

Almost?

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Patriot067

I don't spank my children...regardless...It's no ones business how I discipline my children and it's CERTAINLY NOT my business how other parents discipline their children....So the discussion's absolutely MOOT!

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Burnz

There is one other MAJOR problem with spanking your child. How do you get them to respect other adults? Their friends' parents won't spank them. Sure, you can beat them when they get home, but it means all their respect for others is derived from fear of a beating from you. What happens when they're... [more](#)

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Burnz

Perhaps I can offer a unique perspective. I grew up doing martial arts, I saw my dad trainign when I was little and immediately wanted to learn. When I was 8, I started sparring with my dad and occasionally got one of us would make a mistake, usually it was me hitting him. If I ever misbehaved he w... [more](#)

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northchi

What do you do when all milquetoast forms of discipline fail? If you tell your child he's grounded and he ignores it, then what? At some point some level of physicality becomes necessary. There's a huge difference between grabbing/spanking and beating. There is nothing wrong with physically grabbing... [more](#)

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Hadenuffyet

nofoldems..but take away their car and..lookout.

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nofoldems

Here's a hint: as long as you control their money, you control them.

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HPUCK

Sure there is a fine line between a beating and spanking. My brother and I got spankings and a belt every now and then, and we usally deserved it. We grew up just fine. Time out dosen't always cut it. If you don't apply the discipline early, then you get the undisciplined kids we have today.

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northchi

misst2520, what would you do if you child ignored the grounding rules? Re-obtained said privileges on their own without your permission? In short, totally ignored you? Whether or not your kids do this isn't the question. The question is IF they did, then what? Harsher language? It's the UN model of ... [more](#)

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northchi

It's not a "fine line", it's a freaking wall. Spanking is not hitting to inflict pain. Pretty clear difference.

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misst2520

You do realize that you don't have to spank in order to discipline your child, right? My sister spansks her kids, but not effectively. Sometimes they get spanked for doing something wrong, sometimes they don't. It's because of that inconsistency that her kids have behavioral problems. I don't spa... [more](#)

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PTMarlowe

I raised 3 kids to adulthood and now I am rasing 2 of my step grandchildren. I never spanked or hit any of them. They never lied to me or showed me any disrespect. I never feared my kids acting up when we went out. If you follow the steps in the article they do work, kids love you and do not fear y... [more](#)

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northchi

By assuming all children will react positively to what is laid out in the article, you are in essence assuming that all children are the same. This is of course a ridiculous thing to assume. What you say sounds nice, but it's not how things work in reality.

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mist2520

I would be willing to bet that anyone who says grounding, time out, taking away privileges, etc., don't work is because they don't actually enforce any of these disciplinary actions. These punishments are hard on parents! If you ground your 15 year old, you actually have to make sure they aren't ... [more](#)

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PamelaP12

You have to know your child and not all children are the same. Some children never have to be spanked, others all day long, and some a bit in between. I believe in spanking because I am not interested in being my child's friend I am interested in being their parent. I was spanked as child with be... [more](#)

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lyrker

Excellent article. My siblings and I were spanked by our father, sometimes quite excessively and usually with a belt. The only things it taught us were fear of our father, to lie and to never trust the man when things went wrong. I have kids of my own and never hit them. They are very well-behaved b... [more](#)

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