
PHYSICAL PUNISHMENT INFORMATION SHEET (for adults)

WHAT?

✧ What is Physical Punishment?

Physical punishment is the use of spanking, hitting, or any other form of physical discipline as a consequence for a child's behavior. Physical punishment is not against the law, but it does not always work and can create many problems for parents. Some parents may notice that their child initially behaves when the parent threatens to use physical punishment. Later, parents may have to actually hit their children to get them to behave. And many parents report over time that they have to use physical punishment more and more often and must hit harder in order to get their children to behave. Eventually, these same parents say that physical punishment does not work. Unfortunately, as parents use more and more physical punishment to discipline their children, children may be injured, which can lead to other negative consequences for both parents and children (e.g., CFSA involvement, parent arrested, child removed from the home).

Ask yourself if physical punishment is working for you??????

✧ What is Physical Abuse?

Child physical abuse is when a child receives an injury while he/she is being punished by a parent/caregiver. Many parents do not intend to physically hurt their children, but physical abuse sometimes begins as physical punishment and can escalate to involve physically abusive behavior that causes more serious physical injuries (e.g., bruises, broken bones) to the child.

Physical abuse is most frequently classified as the non-accidental injury of a child under the age of 18 by a parent or caretaker. Non-accidental injuries such as bruises, welts, cuts, broken bones, internal injuries, burns, and bites may result from hitting, shaking, burning, immersing in scalding water, and biting. Physical abuse occurs when the parent/caregiver causes injury or allows the child to be injured.

✧ Why do parents use severe physical punishment or physically abuse their child?

Most parents love their children and have no intention to physically hurt their children. Being a parent is often a stressful and difficult job. Children also have different temperaments making some children easier or more difficult to parent than others. It is certainly normal for parents to feel angry or stressed out about their children's behavior. When parents are stressed about other things (money, work, home/shelter), they may be more prone to get upset with their child. Many parents have felt that you are at wits end with your child's behavior and do not know any other way to discipline their child.

According to the intergenerational transmission of violence theory, the use of physical punishment/violence to resolve conflicts is passed from generation to generation. Parents who use physical punishment to discipline their children may have learned this from their parents/families.

✧ What are the consequences of physical abuse for families?

Children:

Not only does physical punishment/physical abuse not always work to gain children's cooperation, but children's behavior frequently becomes worse. First, hitting does not teach children what it is that we want them to do so they may make the same mistakes over and over again. Unfortunately, hitting children teaches them to hit others.

For example, if parents hit their children, their children learn to hit to solve their problems. Parents can expect their children to hit their class mates, friends, brothers/sisters, and possibly their parents. Statistics report that 81% of children who were abused or witnessed domestic violence will abuse their wives or girlfriends during adolescence or adulthood. And 45 to 70% of men who abuse their spouses/partners physically abuse their children as well. The good news is that violent behavior is learned and can be unlearned. If parents model non-violent respectful behavior for their children, and these behaviors are addressed during childhood, it greatly reduces the likelihood that children will be aggressive as they get older. That's why it's important for children who are exposed to severe physical punishment/physical abuse receive treatment.

Children may also feel anger, helplessness, powerlessness, hostility, guilt, shame, anxiety, and depression. Their aggressive behavior can create more difficulties for them at school and getting along with others. They may also become fearful of their parents.

Parents:

As children's behaviors worsen in response to severe physical punishment/physical abuse, this creates additional stress for parents which can make parenting more difficult and may place them at greater risk for hitting and hurting their children. Many parents feel upset after hitting their children and feel badly about themselves and their parenting abilities. In these situations, parents may also be faced with having CFSA involved in their families, having their children removed from their care, being arrested, and court involvement.

✧ What can you do to prevent physical abuse?

Parents have the power to break the cycle of violence. This is not an easy task. It takes a lot of work on the parent's part, but is possible!!!! First, parents can seek help in an effort to reduce their stress as a parent and to learn ways to gain their child's cooperation without hitting. Send a clear message that violence is unacceptable and teach them non-violent strategies to solve problems. Parents can be good role models for their children by treating their children and

others with respect and kindness. Hitting teaches children to hit, but kindness and respect teaches them to be kind and respectful. Parents can help their children understand that they do not have to accept violence in their relationships; that they deserve to have positive, healthy, non-violent interactions with others. They can also teach their children that all people should be treated equally with respect. As parents respond more positively to their children, their children will respond more positively to them. Violence can stop with you and your child!!!!!!!!!!

WHO?

✧ Who is the victim of physical abuse?

Physical abuse occurs in families from all social, racial, economic, educational and religious backgrounds. Unfortunately, physical abuse is not a very rare occurrence. It is estimated that at least 232,000 children in the United States experience physical abuse every year.

✧ Who commits acts of physical abuse?

In a majority of cases, physical abuse is perpetrated by the children's parents.

HOW?

✧ How is physical abuse in families treated?

While mental health professionals have just begun to develop effective treatments to improve parent-child relationships, some therapies have been successful in helping families get along, reducing parents' stress, and helping parents gain their children's cooperation. Both individual and group therapies are available to assist families coping with physical abuse. An integrated therapy approach provides treatment to parents and their children. Goals of parent services are to reduce stress, to decrease parent-child conflict, and to increase parents' skills in gaining their child's cooperation. Goals of child services are to assist children to process their experiences, and to improve the child's emotional and behavior functioning. Goals of family sessions are to help parents and children get along better, and to improve communication between parents and children.

The group therapy program is time-limited and consists of 16-two hour sessions which involve meeting with both parents and children separately and together.

The individual therapy program consists of 90 minute sessions which involve meeting separately with both the parent and child, as well as family meetings. The length of therapy may exceed 16 sessions if necessary.

WHEN?

✧ When are families at risk for physical abuse?

Parents who are under a great deal of stress, do not seek outside help, and have exhausted all other possibilities for gaining their child's cooperation are at-risk for using severe physical punishment.

WHERE?

✧ Where can you go for help?

DON'T SUFFER SILENTLY! Take control of the situation by asking for help.

If you feel like you are at wits end with your child and fear you may lose control when your child misbehaves, help is available to assist you.

Contact the DCG – DMH – Access Helpline at (202) 561-7000 or toll-free at (888) 793-4357. The Access Helpline provides 24 hour access to crisis and mental health services for all residents in the District of Columbia. They have a mental health clinician available at all times to evaluate callers' needs and connect them with appropriate mental health providers.