

Our message here is not aimed at dedicated professional teachers who adhere to the highest standards and have the best interests of children at heart. Such teachers have our support and admiration. They do not need our advice. Our concern here is about the others — the ones who require clear guidelines. We believe it is dangerously irresponsible to allow people who are in charge of children to set their own standards and follow their own whims once the classroom door is shut.

Currently 21 states allow teachers and school principals to beat children on their pelvic area with a stick for disciplinary reasons. The polite term for this practice is “corporal punishment.” And where beating is okay, inevitably other abusive practices are swept along with it. For example: shaking, shoving, grabbing children, manhandling them, berating and humiliating them, denying their use of the bathroom and forcing them to run laps and do push-ups to exhaustion as a form of punishment.

When schools stoop to such practices, they set the worst possible example. The United States stands virtually alone among civilized nations in authorizing this kind of child abuse.

We believe it's time education policy makers established a higher standard for teacher conduct. It's time they drew a sharp line between what's okay and what's not. Smacking a human being's pelvic area with a flat board is clearly not okay! The only lesson it teaches is that violence works for the person who is bigger and stronger. That's not the lesson we should be teaching our children.

Children should not come to school feeling frightened by teachers and should not spend the day in a punitive environment that inspires resentment and a desire to escape. School should be a place that welcomes children and makes them feel safe. Teachers should model the kind of behavior they expect. They should earn respect by showing respect. Given better examples, children will perform better and behave better. The old adage, “You get what you give,” was never more true than in the classroom. Nobody should be surprised that the most punitive schools also have the highest drop-out rates.

## It's time to toss the trash!



One aspect of the corporal punishment debate is typically excluded from the discussion: the sexual side.

Medical science has long recognized and documented in great detail how being struck on the buttocks can stimulate sexual feelings. Children are especially susceptible.

The tragic consequence for many children who have been punished by paddling or spanking is that they form a connection between pain, humiliation and sexual arousal that endures for the rest of their lives.

In *Slaughter of the Innocents* (1971), Canadian scientist David Bakan writes, “...The buttocks are the locus for the induction of pain in a child. We are familiar with the argument that it is a safe ‘locus’ for spanking. However, the anal region is also the major erotic region at precisely the time the child is likely to be beaten there. Thus it is aptly chosen to achieve the result of deranged sexuality in adulthood...”

Would any responsible adult knowingly do this to a child?

Apparently some people experience a profound need to dominate a defenseless victim, including the need to inflict terror and pain by beating. This compulsion probably has its origin in their own early experience of cruelty at some critical stage of their development. Such people have been known to seek employment in paddling schools because those places give them free rein to indulge this perverse appetite.

In an apparent attempt to guard against such impropriety, many paddling schools require paddling to be done in the presence of a witness. But no one has ever explained what the witness is supposed to be witnessing or preventing, and there is nothing to prevent the paddler and the witness from being accomplices in an act of sexual battery. Team paddling only protects the adult perpetrators and their employer, not the child. For the child, who is a non-consenting, unequal party in the act, stimulation of the buttocks, painful or otherwise, is also sexual. It's a felony when done to an unwilling adult.

In light of these dangers, why is child beating legal? Why is it even applauded and encouraged in some circles?

The answer isn't complicated. People who hit children find affirmation in the fact that many others do it as well. “After all,” they reason, “if everyone, including teachers, is doing it, what can be so wrong?” This mutual reinforcement among child abusers calms doubts and soothes troubled consciences.

If we put all other considerations aside, this should be reason enough to close the legal loophole that allows assault and battery of the young. Lawmakers should be lining up to cosponsor such legislation.

April 2008

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