

Harsh Discipline: Does it do More Harm than Good?

Recent studies suggest that low-income parents tend to endorse much harsher discipline, partially because they hold stronger beliefs about the value of spanking and experience higher levels of stress.

However, parents who work in high-stress jobs or are stay-at-home parents who are feeling frustrated or isolated are also at risk. It's imperative that parents recognize their tendency to punish a child too severely and take the needed steps to make sure the punishment is appropriate for their child's age, temperament and maturity level.

The study's finding showed that parents from lower income levels or work high pressure jobs are more stressed, and they react more emotionally to their child's behavior, and thus use harsher discipline. A parent in this situation may benefit from outside assistance and learning about alternative disciplinary strategies that are more appropriate and less harsh.

It's also important for a parent to realize that children thrive on praise. Parents in such a situation may always jump to discipline but fail to praise their child for their good deeds, behaviors and traits. Children instinctively want to please their parents and make them proud. By encouraging positive behavior, the parent will most likely discourage the behavior that has driven them in the past to punish too harshly.

In order to encourage positive behavior deserving of praise, parents might want to consider giving their child a task they know they're able to accomplish, and praise their efforts along the way. Parents need to also consistently praise their children for the positive traits they possess. Their child might be good at math in school, helpful to their little brother or sister, or is good at drawing pictures. Praise these good traits and the child is likely to respond by acting appropriately and behaving positively in order to gain more praise. In the end, it's important to remember that a child is just that - a child. A parent should make a concerted effort to make sure the discipline is appropriate and take care of themselves physically, mentally and emotionally so they can optimally provide for their child's physical and emotional well-being.