Striking a Balance: A Culturally Compassionate Look at Corporal Punishment and How We End It

Lauren Bugge, MD
Jaime Nelson, LMW
Karen Lacy, MD
Andrew Selvaggio, ANP-BC, PA-C

The presenters do not have a financial disclosure or a conflict of interest with the presented material in this presentation.

Learning Objectives

- Identify
- Recognize
- Navigate
- Discuss
- Accept

Identify

Recognize

Navigate

Discuss

Accept
A word if I may...

Many cultural aspects to CP (religious, racial, socio-economic)

Primarily focusing on CP in African American Communities

This reflects my experience and my journey

Inspired by the book *Spare the Kids* by Dr. Stacey Paton

My Story

- Lived most of my life in West TX
- Completed most of my training in TX
- Given life thought to different situations of CP

A Different Culture
What role do I play?

- CP in African American communities was never discussed in my training as a Child Abuse Pediatrician
- Strategies we use seem ineffective and feel hypocritical and cruel
- Lack of resources specifically tailored to families of color AND for the doctors who serve them
- Am I part of the problem?

Spare the Kids (pg 21)

“For many black parents, not spanking is viewed as selling out or acting white... We scoff at their privilege and how nice it must be to have the luxury to ignore the misdeeds of your children in public spaces. Only those with privilege have the time to read parenting blogs and books about positive discipline. Only those who don’t have to worry about being seen as another bad black parent can think that no TV time for little Connor and Becky will lead to them knowing how to act right in the world. This kind of racialized mockery had become part of how we rationalize hurting black children’s bodies.”
Spare the Kids (pg 9)

"I also recognize that we understandably have a profound distrust of white "experts"...How do you trust the people who tell you to stop beating our kids when they’re constantly creating and sustaining the conditions that compel us to do whatever we feel we need to maintain our kid’s safety? It’s a cruel, double-edged sword."

What about Black children?
- Black families face enormous pressure to use C.
- More Black parents spank their children than those of other ethnic groups.
- Black children are not given the privilege of misbehaving in public.
- Profound distrust of White "experts".
- "The violence our children face from the school system, the police, and from their parents is all interconnected."

This is it! Now what?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Educate</th>
<th>I need to educate myself</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Reach out</td>
<td>I need to reach out to others with more insight and experience</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Practice</td>
<td>I need to practice sharing what I learn</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Why is CP “no bueno”?

“What’s in a name? that which we call
a rose
By any other name would smell as sweet”

- Spanking
- Pinching
- Whooping
- Smacking
- Thrashing
- Swatting
- Paddling
- Whipping

HITTING

What does the AAP say?

AMERICAN ACADEMY OF PEDIATRICS
Consultative: Psychosocial Aspects of Child and Family Health
Guidance for Effective Discipline

1998
What does the AAP say?

2018

Policy recommendations

- Foster positive parent/child relationships before and during discipline, and promote positive communication
- Provide consistent, clear, and reasonable rules and consequences
- Use non-descriminatory, non-aggressive discipline
- Avoid physical punishment
- Avoid verbal abuse
- Use positive reinforcement

Effective Discipline to Raise Healthy Children

How Effective is CP?

- Not effective long-term
- May show short-term effectiveness

What does the research show?

- Children who are spanked at 3 are more aggressive at 5
- Children who are spanked at 5 have more externalizing behaviors and poor social skills
- Spanking begets spanking

PEDIATRICS

What’s so bad about spanking...eh...I mean hitting?

- Corporal punishment of children younger than 10 months of age increases the likelihood of physical harm.
- Corporal punishment is associated with a higher rate of mental health, learning, and cognitive problems.
- The use of harsh punishment is increased when the family is experiencing stress, such as family economic challenges, mental health problems, intimate partner violence, or substance abuse.

- Repeated use of corporal punishment may lead to aggressive behavior and alterations between the parent and child and may negatively affect the parent-child relationship.
- Corporal punishment is associated with increased aggression in preschool and school-aged children.
- Experiencing corporal punishment makes it more likely that children will be aggressive and aggressive in the future.

Effective Discipline to Raise Healthy Children

GP’s effect on the brain

- Decreased prefrontal cortical gray matter
- Decreased performance IQ
- Elevated cortisol changes in brain architecture

Spanking as an ACE

The association between corporal punishment and adverse adult health outcomes was examined in a 2017 report that analyzed original data from the 1998 Adverse Childhood Experiences Study, which recommended that spanking be considered as an additional independent risk factor, similar in nature and effect to other adverse childhood experiences. In their analysis of the original 1998 Adverse Childhood Experiences study data, the investigators found that spanking was an independent predictor of depression, anxiety, and suicidality and was associated with aggression and other emotional disorders in adulthood independent of the risks associated with having experienced physical and emotional abuse.
• What about Black families living in a broken world with a broken system?

How do I cause the least amount of harm as a clinician or professional?

Conversational Highlights To Remember

1. Pathologize the behaviors, not the people.
2. Identify and confront any implicit biases so that they do not become barriers to families’ willingness to receive education and resources.
3. Prioritize building rapport and genuine relationships with these families.
Madeline’s Story

Barriers to Implementation

1. Systemic Concerns of African American parents
2. Normalization of Corporal Punishment in the African American Community
3. Distrust of White Experts
4. Fear of trying something different
5. Environmental Stressors facing many African American Families
Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs

Racial Bias and Child Welfare
FACT: There is an overrepresentation of African American children in the Child Welfare System

Why?
• Mandated reporting law only requires a "reasonable suspicion for abuse or neglect"
• Medical providers are more influential
• Biases may be magnified
What do we know?

- Jenny et al., (1999) Missed cases of AHT
- Lane et al., (2002) Racial Differences in Pediatric Fractures
- Woods et al., (2010) Skeletal surveys for TBI
- Hymel et al., (2018) Implicit Bias of physicians for AHT diagnosis and reporting

And so it begins...

- Black children are reported to CPS 2x White children
- Reports involving black children are more likely to be investigated
- Investigations involving black children are more likely to be substantiated
- Cases involving black children are more likely to result in removal

But wait....

- Laskey et al (2011) Randomized study of race and SES status on physicians' diagnosis of abuse
- Rojas et al (2017) Examined the influence of pediatricians' implicit racial bias on the recognition of child abuse
Feely and Bosk, 2021

How are structural* factors accounted for in assessment of risk within CPS?

What are the consequences when structural factors are left out of risk assessment procedures?

*economic hardship, residential segregation, white political power, inequality in educational and economic opportunities, policies and practices designed to deflect access based on race

Structural Risk Explanation

- The overrepresentation of Black, Native American, and Latino children is a direct result of explicit structural and implicit individual bias
- Structural racism: insufficient resources to provide consistent safe and consistent care for their children
- Lapses in care leaving children at risk of harm (paramours)
- Structural racism leads to differential rates of poverty by race or ethnicity
- Emphasis on individual bias overshadows recognition of structural racism and poverty
- *Interventions focused on individuals instead of the underlying cause of maltreatment will undermine success*

How can we make our spaces safe for all families?
No Hit Zone

- Dr. Linda "Lilly" McDavid
- Nationwide Children's Hospital
  in Columbus, OH
- Program that urges parents to discipline
  their children without frequent spanking

No Hit Zone (NHZ)

- The No Hit Zone concept is simple: it is an environment in
  which no adult shall hit another
  adult, no adult shall hit a child, no
  child shall hit an adult, and no
  child shall hit another child

Positive Outcomes

- Staff feel they have more strategies to intervene if
  someone is hitting, and more likely to support "less
  spanking.
- Staff is more aware of potential harm of hitting, their
  obligation to intervene, and felt that they had
  strategies to intervene.
Perceived Barriers to the NHZ

- Social norms surrounding physical punishment
- Ineffectiveness of the NHZ policy
- Resource issues
- Problems related to training

Is it enough?

Shiloh Baptist Church

- Founded in 1880 in Trenton, NJ
- Churches serve as a cultural safe place

Are there other safe places to consider as a NHZ?

- As of 2/2020 there are 174
  sites registered and interested in the NHZ.
- The Ocean County, Monmouth, and Atlantic
  Attorney's Office, including the public
  witness, is on the list.
- The entire city of
  Stratford, Westville, is a NHZ. The city has
  programs, services, and facilities
  including parks that need "network
  plans" as a reminder.
CP in schools

It is important to note that schools should be an environment where students feel safe. However, schools are the only place where an adult who is not the child’s parent or guardian cannot be in a child’s space. When we consider that we are still operating under the rule of law that punishes all forms of corporal punishment on adults, military personnel, and patients in mental health hospitals. It is time we provided the same protection to school children. Students who are hit at school by teachers or other administrators are required to return to school the next day and face the same adult. Over 30 countries worldwide do not use any form of corporal punishment in their educational settings. The US lags far behind even underdeveloped countries on this issue.

It's not just physical spaces...

"Black parents must realize that culture changes are normal and do not mean cultural loss."

—Raising Black Children

Drs. James P. Comer and Alvin F. Poussaint

Discipline vs Punishment
Discipline

“training that corrects, molds, or perfects the mental faculties or moral character”
-Merloni-Weisset 2021

Punishment

“suffering, pain, or loss that serves as retribution, severe, rough, or disastrous treatment”
-Merloni-Weisset 2021

Discipline vs. Punishment

- Positive reinforcement
- Loving and supportive
- Modelling behavior
- Teaches self-control
- Builds confidence
- Negative, inflicts suffering
- Anger and shaming
- Often disconnected from the transgression
- Caregiver is in control
- Increase anxiety, lowers self-esteem
"Why do Parents Hit Their Children?"

- Socio-cultural Influences
- Family and Social Environment
- Child Variables
- Care-Giver Variables-
  - Conscious Thoughts
  - Unconscious Motives

Holden, G.W., 2020

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Unconscious Motives</th>
<th>Psychological approach</th>
<th>Psychoanalytic approach</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
|                     | Ressources, 1999        | Basis analyzed among child
|                     | Brody, 1967             | - anger, rage
|                     |                        | - facility to express aggression
|                     |                        | - parent aware of consequences
|                     |                        | - parent understands child's needs
|                     |                        | - parent is responsive
|                     |                        | - parent is affectionate
|                     |                        | - parent is nurturing

Is Spanking Sexual Abuse?
If CP is so bad then what can I do?

Alternatives to Spanking
*You can’t just say, “don’t spank!”*

10 Healthy Discipline Strategies That Work
[healthykids.org](http://healthykids.org)

- Show and Tell
- Set limits
- Give consequences
- Hear them out
- Give them your attention
- Catch them being good
- Know when to respond
- Be prepared for trouble
- Redirect bad behavior
- Call a time out
Effective Black Parenting Program

"The traditional Black conception of discipline is highly positive. It grew out of the experiences and out of the racism and poverty that has continued since emancipation. It is based on survival, fear, and not having the time to develop other ideas about discipline."

The Black Child: A Parent’s Guide
Dr. Phyllis Harrison-Ross, Co- author
What Can We Do?

- Be a brave clinician / professional
- Discuss the legacy of white supremacy and acknowledge your own bias
- Use language that supports families ("partner" not "husband")
- Discuss the pros/cons of spanking
- "When youhit me" app

"Cultural competency means that professionals develop the ability to translate and communicate the intersections between historical trauma and the research on child development, the effects of physical discipline on the developing brain, and the connections between family violence and racial disparities in education, foster care and juvenile justice — all while offering healthier parenting practice alternatives to diverse families."
“Instead of blaming and stigmatizing black parents, professionals can offer information about why the practice is harmful but have been told it is necessary, and offer healthier alternatives that produce better outcomes for children, families and communities. Such an approach will support black parents’ own parenting goals as they strive for the security and welfare of their children.”

---

**There’s more to do!**

- Many other cultural, religious, and social perspectives on CP that we did not discuss today
- Influence how child welfare systems view CP and the differing role it plays in specific communities
- Change how CP is perceived and processed in the criminal justice system
- Be curious

---

**What Is Yours To Do?**
TREAT RACISM LIKE COVID-19

1. Assume you have it
2. Listen to experts about it
3. Don't spread it
4. Be willing to change your life to end it