

## Never Spanking Can Make Life Better for Parents and the Nation, UNH Expert Says

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DURHAM, N.H. -- Children who are not spanked not only tend to be better behaved and do better academically in school, they also grow up and tend to have better marriages, earn more money and live better lives, according to Murray A. Straus, founder and co-director of the Family Research Laboratory at the University of New Hampshire.

"Lots of people are worried that if parents never spanked, the result would be kids running wild, higher rates of delinquency, and when they grow up, more crime," Straus says. "Actually, what the research shows is just the opposite."

Straus presented these results today, July 7, at a conference in Denver, Colo., on "Charting Global Progress Towards Ending Corporal Punishment of Children."

Straus points out that there has been 50 years of research on the effectiveness and the side effects of spanking. He says the results from this enormous amount of research are in almost complete agreement on two things:

First, Straus notes, "Although spanking works, it does **not** work better than other methods of correcting and teaching kids, according to five decades of research.

"Second, spanking has harmful side effects, like increasing the chance that a child will become rebellious or depressed. Unfortunately, parents have no way of knowing this because these side effects take months or years to show up. If parents knew that when

they spank they are increasing the chances that the child will be rebellious or depressed, I don't think very many would do it."

Straus says parents should choose the method of discipline as though they were choosing a medicine. "Suppose there are two medicines that work equally well, but one has harmful side effects. I think that most people would avoid the medicine with the harmful side effects. That's the way we should think about spanking. The research shows that spanking does not work any better than other medicines, but that it has harmful side effects. So the best thing is to use medicines that work equally well and do not have these side effects."

And, Straus points out, some of the alternatives have beneficial side effects. "For example, explaining and reasoning provide kids with examples that teach them how to reason and explain," he says. "In the short run, it can be a big pain in the neck to have a child who expects a reason and explanation for everything. But in the long run, that is the kind of person most parents want their child to grow up to be."

The research that Straus summarized at the conference in Denver shows that not spanking has many benefits. Toddlers and young children who are not spanked tend to have faster mental development. Kids also tend to do better in school, and there is a higher chance of graduating from college.

There also is less hitting of other children, and children who are not spanked tend not to become parents who spank when they grow up. There is less violence against dating or marriage partners as well.

Straus also says that children who are spanked less suffer less from depression and alcohol abuse as adults and have a greater chance of being in the top fifth of the country in jobs and income.

"Five decades of spanking research tells us a lot," Straus says. "If adults stopped hitting children, they would have less hassle with their children, and when their kids grow up, they would help make our country less violent, healthier, wealthier and wiser."

Straus is the author or co-author of more than 200

publications, including *Beating the Devil Out Of Them: Corporal Punishment By American Parents and Its Effects on Children*, the second edition of which was published last year, and a book due out next year, *The Primordial Violence: Corporal Punishment By Parents, Cognitive Development, and Crime*. For copies of Straus's papers or more bio information, go to <http://publpages.unh.edu/~mas2>.

**Murray Straus may be reached through Friday, July 5, except the Fourth of July, at 603-862-2594, and by fax at the Holiday Inn in Denver, July 6 through July 9. The fax number there is 303-572-1113.**

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