

Statements & Messages

Corporal punishment in schools creates more trauma for children

August 30, 2022 | 2 min read

Posted by **Chris Oquist***By Dr. Melissa Merrick**President and CEO of Prevent Child Abuse America*

Hitting children is not only allowed across the US but, as we recently saw in Missouri, being encouraged to occur by state employees in school settings. Currently, there are 19 states across the US that allow children to be hit in public schools.

The experts agree: hitting kids does not promote healthy development. In fact, not a single scientific research study demonstrates that hitting children leads to healthy, compassionate, respectful, and successful adults. In fact, the opposite is true. Hitting children—whether you call it spanking, popping, paddling, whooping, slapping—increases the chances that children will be more violent, experience mental health and academic problems, and develop problems with drugs or alcohol. Heading this science, professional organizations and societies, including the American Academy of Pediatrics, have taken strong positions against hitting children. Sixty-three countries across the world have banned the hitting of children—the US is not one of those countries.

And while anecdotal reports from a single administrator, in a single location may convince you that there is overwhelming support for such practices, survey research demonstrate a different consensus. In the early 2000's, approximately 75% of adults disagreed with hitting children in schools. When Prevent Child Abuse America surveyed over 3,000 adults from across the US in 2020, only 18% of

US adults disagreed with banning hitting in school. So, if most adults agree that this practice does not belong in schools, why are we creating laws to codify these practices?

What is the purpose of allowing hitting children in schools? Are they acting out in the classroom? Again, what the science tells us is that when children experience violence in their homes and communities, they are more likely to act-out behaviorally at school. Now consider the traumatizing experience of re-entering school with so many recent and ongoing threats – COVID, bullying and shootings – and now hitting. By allowing children to be hit in schools, by people that are supposed to be teaching and caring for them, we are not creating a safe and nurturing space for children to learn. Even the threat of experiencing violence in schools can have deleterious impacts for children.

We applaud states like North Carolina where, despite a law on the books allowing the hitting of children in schools, they have managed to institute voluntary bans of hitting across all school districts in the state. And, we encourage approaches like social emotional learning and other non-physical, developmentally-appropriate strategies that have been found to be effective at reducing problem behavior and create a positive learning environment for students.

Prevent Child Abuse America strongly opposes any use of violence against children, including in state sanctioned hitting in our schools.

Together, we can prevent child abuse, America...
Because childhood lasts a lifetime.