

[Punishment leaves intelligence behind, says study](#)

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LEARNING

Punishment leaves intelligence behind, says study

Young ashok was caned one morning before school for pushing his sister. Next door, Kugan pushed his sister, but instead of caning, mom sat him down and calmly explained more appropriate behavior. That day in school, was Ashok as receptive to learning as Kugan? Not according to the University of New Hampshire's Murray Straus, co-director of the Family Research Laboratory (www.unh.edu/frl/) and author of numerous studies on after-effects of corporal punishment. He and Mallie Paschall have found that children who are never or rarely spanked have higher scores on tests of cognitive ability (knowing through awareness, perception, reasoning, judgment) than those frequently spanked. Spanking refers to several forms of punishment, such as slapping, caning or paddling.

The findings are based on a representative sample of 960 US children ages one to four at the start of the study. The study took into account many other factors that could affect a child's cognitive ability--mother's age, education, whether the father was present in the household, number of children in the family, mother's supportiveness and cognitive stimulation, ethnic group and the child's age, gender and birth weight.

"Cognitive ability of children who were not spanked in either of two sample weeks increased, while cognitive ability of children who were frequently spanked decreased," reports Straus. "Children who were spanked didn't get dumber. The study shows that spanking is associated with falling behind the average rate of cognitive development, not an absolute decrease in cognition."

Straus believes one reason for higher cognitive ability in children spanked the least is that, wanting to avoid corporal punishment, "parents use more verbal methods of control, such as explaining to the child." Some parents think explaining correct behavior is a waste, but research shows these verbal parent-child interactions enhance the child's cognitive stimulation. Straus's study also confirms recent brain research showing that we "downshift" from our brain's cerebral cortex (cognitive learning center) into instinctiveness when faced with threat. Even if the parent says she is smacking "with love," can we honestly expect that a spank seems nonthreatening to a child? No.

In another study about learning, Claudia Mueller and Carol Dweck of Columbia University found that children told they were smart were vulnerable to setbacks, while those praised for their efforts were not. "Praising children's intelligence, far from boosting their self-esteem, encourages them to embrace self-defeating behaviors like worrying about failure and avoiding risks," Dweck said. "But when children are taught the value of concentrating, strategizing and working hard in dealing with academic challenges, they're encouraged to sustain their motivation, performance and self-esteem." Bottom line--it's better to praise Anjali for her hard work than

for her brains.

Since discipline means "to teach" and corporal punishment is now scientifically proven to impair learning ability, Hindus should avoid violent child rearing.

BOOKS

Child Abuse

To identify and prevent

You greet your school students one morning and Devi, usually cheerful, walks in the classroom looking sullen, with a slight limp, and, oh, it looks like there may even be a red mark on her cheek. What should you do?

As child abuse escalates, parents are asking: What is child abuse? How do I talk to children about sexual abuse? Who are the abusers? Are my children at risk? How do I cope if my child is abused? Nowhere are answers more thoroughly given than in James A. Monteleone, M.D.'s, new *A Parent's & Teacher's Handbook on Identifying and Preventing Child Abuse*, (G.W. Medical Publishing). It's not that Dr. Monteleone wasn't dealing with abuse for many years. It's just that, until now, there was no request for practical, hands-on information for parents.

You'll find out what abusive injuries look like (paleness, sweating, vomiting or difficulty in breathing can mean an infant was shaken), what behavioral signs mean and don't mean (injuring pets can indicate a child is abused) and how to communicate with children regarding body safety issues (just as you'd teach kids to look both ways before crossing a street,

while sparing gory details of what it's like to be run down, you can teach about sexual abuse without being graphic). Dr. Monteleone explains how to work with US laws, create a supportive home environment and how to keep kids safe on the Internet. In the first edition of the book, Dr. Monteleone disapproved of most corporal punishment, but his next edition makes a compelling argument that any form of physical punishment is abusive. 1Ã21Ã4

G.W. MEDICAL PUBLISHING, 2601 METRO BLVD, ST. LOUIS,
MISSOURI 63043 USA, WEBSITE: WWW.GWMEDICALCOM