The line between acceptable corporal punishment and dangerous physical abuse is usually drawn in the sand on a blustery day; there are no guidelines.

Corporal Punishment Is Ineffective and Abusive

Melanie Barwick

Melanie Barwick is a psychologist and health systems scientist in the Community Health Systems Resource Group at SickKids in Toronto, Canada. In the following viewpoint, she opposes corporal punishment to discipline children. Although such punishment results in immediate compliance, Barwick maintains that children must be taught to control their behavior with internalized morals and values—not external physical threats—for healthy socialization. Moreover, harsh punishment is associated with depression and stress in adolescence, she states, and coercive parenting leads to increased feelings of helplessness and humiliation among children. Barwick adds that children's brains are still developing, and misbehavior is not always intentional but linked to a lack of maturity, understanding, or impulse control.
How Should Parents Discipline Their Children?

As you read, consider the following questions:

1. What is Barwick’s view of a parent or caregiver who does not mean to cause harm with corporal punishment?

2. In the author’s view, how can children’s knowledge of the right way to behave be enhanced?

3. What does physical punishment communicate to children, as stated by the author?

Section 43 of Canada’s criminal code allows parents, teachers and caregivers to use reasonable force to discipline a child and correct their behaviour. Bill S-209, which needs House [of Commons] approval to be made into law, proposes to eliminate section 43 of Canada’s criminal code and give adults the right to physically discipline children between the ages of two and 12 [the bill has not been passed].

The code calls to mind several questions:

- How were these age parameters chosen?

- Is there something about being younger than two or older than 12 that suggests greater harm from physical punishment will befall these children as compared to children three to 11?

- Where do we draw the line in disciplining our children and what right does the government have to legislate parenting or caregiving style?

- How do you balance a parent’s right to parent and a kid’s right not to be abused?

The purpose of the bill, according to Liberal senator Céline Hervieux-Payette, who introduced it, is “to send a signal, so that people who use violence in a repeated way will no longer feel protected... It is not to arrest everyone who gives their child a tap on the arm.” The bill was amended to allow par-