

WHY HITTING CHILDREN HARMS THEM

WHAT RESEARCH CONSISTENTLY SHOWS

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HITTING CHILDREN MAY STOP BEHAVIOUR, BUT IT DOES NOT TEACH BETTER BEHAVIOUR

Hitting can stop a behaviour in the moment because the child wants to avoid pain. However, it does not help children understand why the behaviour was wrong or what they should do instead. Children learn better behaviour when adults explain what went wrong, guide them, and give them chances to practise.

CHILDREN LEARN BEHAVIOUR BY OBSERVING ADULTS

Children learn how to behave largely by watching adults. When adults respond to problems or frustration by hitting, children learn that physical force is a way to deal with conflict. Research shows that children who are hit are more likely to use aggression with siblings and peers.



HITTING INCREASES STRESS IN THE CHILD'S BRAIN

When a child is hit, the brain interprets this as a threat. The body activates a stress response, often described as fight, flight, or freeze. When this stress response is active, the brain is less able to think clearly, learn from the situation, and regulate emotions. This makes learning from discipline much harder.

IT CAN WEAKEN THE SENSE OF SAFETY CHILDREN NEED

Children rely on caregivers for safety and protection. When the same adult who provides care also causes pain, this can create confusion and distress for the child. A strong sense of safety with caregivers is important for healthy emotional development.



RESEARCH LINKS HITTING CHILDREN WITH POORER OUTCOMES

Large studies across many countries have found consistent links between hitting children and increased aggression, more behaviour problems, higher levels of anxiety and depression, and weaker parent-child relationships. These patterns appear even when hitting is intended as discipline rather than abuse.

CHILDREN DEVELOP SELF-CONTROL THROUGH GUIDANCE, NOT PAIN

Self-regulation develops gradually through supportive relationships. Children learn best when adults set clear and consistent limits, explain expectations, stay calm during difficult moments, and help children repair mistakes. This approach builds understanding, responsibility, and trust.



THE CONCLUSION FROM DECADES OF RESEARCH

Hitting may stop behaviour in the moment.

But it does not teach the skills children need to manage emotions, solve problems, and make better choices.

Children learn best through guidance, connection, and consistent boundaries.

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