



A publication from C.S. Mott Children's Hospital, the University of Michigan Department of Pediatrics and Communicable Diseases, and the University of Michigan Child Health Evaluation and Research (CHEAR) Unit

Speak or Spank? More Parents Choose Reasoning Than Physical Discipline

Misbehaving is part of growing up, and of learning right from wrong. But how do parents decide how to let kids know they have stepped out of line?

Parents' choices of discipline for their kids include a wide range of options, from verbal discussions to physical punishment. Experts have different opinions about how effective different strategies are. Meanwhile, little is known about what types of discipline are favored by parents in the US today.

In a recent poll, the CS Mott Children's Hospital National Poll on Children's Health presented a series of scenarios to parents with children 2-17 years old and asked how likely they were to use different discipline strategies with their child.

Parents' Choices for Discipline Strategies

Parents were given behavior scenarios for children 2-5, 6-12 or 12-17 years old (depending on the ages of their own children). The most common discipline strategies parents report that they are "very likely" to use were: explain or reason with the child (88%), take away a privilege or something the child enjoys (70%), and time outs or grounding (59%) (Table 1). Many parents reported they were very likely to use more than one strategy.

Table 1. Discipline Strategies Parents Are Very Likely To Use

	All Children Age 2-17	Age 2-5	Age 6-12	Age 13-17
Explain or reason	88%	88%	89%	87%
Take away a privilege or something the child enjoys	70%	53%	75%	81%
Time out or grounding	59%	62%	46%	72%
Spank	22%	30%	24%	13%
Paddle	10%	8%	10%	12%

Source: C.S. Mott Children's Hospital National Poll on Children's Health, 2010

Less than one-quarter of parents report that they would be "very likely" to spank or paddle their children. Parents of preschool children are more likely to spank than parents of older children.

Parents who live in the West (31%) and South (20%) regions of the country are more likely to spank their children compared to parents in the Midwest (16%) and Northeast (6%).

Parents of children with behavioral or physical disabilities are less likely (13%) to spank compared with parents whose children do not have these health conditions (24%).

Report Highlights

- **The most common discipline strategies parents use are explaining or reasoning, taking away a privilege, and time outs or grounding.**
- **1 in 5 parents report spanking their children nationally, with higher rates in some regions.**

Implications

Recent media reports have alerted parents to the dangers of spanking, because of research indicating that young children who are spanked may grow up to be more aggressive. Results of this national study indicate that the vast majority of parents are already avoiding spanking and similar approaches like paddling. In fact, many parents reported that they use a variety of discipline techniques for their kids. In addition, parents overall showed that they tailor their discipline to the age of the child.

These poll results indicate that many parents feel they can use a variety of strategies, but what remains to be seen is how effective they think they are. While a great deal of research attention has focused on spanking, much less has looked at the results of discussion-based or privilege-removal approaches—in terms of how kids learn and how they develop emotionally.

Data Source

This report presents findings from a nationally representative household survey conducted exclusively by Knowledge Networks, Inc. for C.S. Mott Children's Hospital via a method used in many published studies. The survey was administered January 1-18, 2010 to a randomly selected, stratified group of parents aged 18 and older (n= 1,532) with children 2-17 years of age from the Knowledge Networks standing panel that closely resembles the U.S. population. The sample was subsequently weighted to reflect population figures from the Census Bureau. The survey completion rate was 71% among parent panel members contacted to participate. The margin of sampling error is plus or minus 3 to 7 percentage points for the main analysis.

C.S. Mott Children's Hospital National Poll on Children's Health

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This Report includes research findings from the C.S. Mott Children's Hospital National Poll on Children's Health, which do not represent the opinions of the investigators or the opinions of the University of Michigan.