

A National Initiative to End Corporal Punishment

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Spanking and slapping children, typically labeled *physical or corporal punishment* (CP), is alive and well in many schools and homes in the United States. Nineteen states allow children to be paddled in public schools and 48 states allow the discipline in private schools (Gershoff, Purtell, & Holas, 2015). A recent opinion poll, taken by ABC News in October 2018, found that 65% of the more than 1,000 randomly sampled, nationally representative adults approve of CP in the home. Half of the parents in the survey admitted to sometimes spanking their young children. But considerable regional differences were found, with the preference for spanking much higher in the south than other parts of the country. In contrast to home CP, 72% of the adults interviewed did not approve of school CP (Crandall, 2018). Furthermore, the General Social Survey (Child Trends, 2015) indicates the overall approval to parental use of CP has slowly decreased in the United States in the past few decades.

The decline is likely attributable to the increased attention regarding the consequences of adults hitting children. This awareness comes from a confluence of sources, including the ever-increasing number of empirical studies revealing the negative associations with CP (Gershoff & Grogan-Kaylor, 2016), stories in the press and social media (e.g., an interview with the football star, Adrian Peterson, who reports he continues to hit his child despite more than 4 years ago being suspended by the NFL and reprimanded by the court [CBS Sports, 2018]), and periodic news that other

countries have legislatively banned CP based on human rights concerns (e.g., in October 2018, Nepal became the 54th nation).

Although the United States has lagged behind many other countries in recognizing the problem of CP (Sweden banned CP in 1979), the movement to end the practice in the U.S. is gaining steam. As we will describe, a reinvigorated effort is emerging due to the leadership of the American Professional Society on the Abuse of Children (APSAC) and the Vincent J. Fontana Center for Child Protection of the New York Foundling (The Foundling), along with researchers, social activists, and others committed to working to end this harmful disciplinary behavior. Many may be surprised to learn that efforts to end CP of children are not new in the United States (Holden, Wright, & Sendek, 2019). Therefore, we provide a brief summary of the movement of individuals, dating back to the colonial period, and more recently, of organizations that have spoken out against hitting children.

Brief History of Corporal Punishment in the U.S.

Harsh punishment was endemic in colonial schools and in many Puritan homes (Piele, 1978). However, it was not universal; many schools as well as families in the middle and southern colonies were unlikely to employ such disciplinary practices. Historians (e.g., Glenn, 1984) determined that from about 1820 until the onset of the Civil War (1820–1860), a campaign to end the use of “brute force” in schools had begun. The foremost

advocate of the movement was the educator Horace Mann, but he was joined by voices from other educators (e.g., Lyman Cobb), physicians (e.g., William Alcott), authors (e.g., Walt Whitman), and others.

The second wave of anti-CP activity emerged after the Civil War (from late 1870s to late 1920s). In fact, just 2 years after the war ended, New Jersey became the first state in the country to ban CP in its public schools. The horrendous child abuse and neglect case of Mary Ellen Wilson in 1874 added momentum to the second wave. Key individuals who argued against harsh punishment and taking a more child-centered orientation to education and childrearing included the following: the philosopher, psychologist, and educational reformer John Dewey; the social activist Jane Addams; and psychologists, such as Boris Sidis and John B. Watson. The second wave ended with the onset of the Great Depression, when the nation's attention turned to economic matters.

The third wave, roughly beginning in 1972 and continuing to the present, was initiated with the release of a report from the National Education Association's Task Force on Corporal Punishment. The report recommended the elimination of school CP. This wave differs from earlier efforts because it is supported by scientific evidence as well as a number of organizations. In the 1970s, researchers, most notably Murray Straus (1926-2016) and Irwin Hyman (1935-2005), began publishing articles about problems with parental CP and school CP, respectively.

Also, various organizations formed to promote an anti-CP message, including End Violence Against the Next Generation (founded by Adah Maurer), Parents and Teachers Against Violence in Education (Jordan Riak), End Physical Punishment of Children—USA (Philip Greven and Adrienne Haeuser), the Ohio Coalition for More Effective School Discipline (Nadine Block and Robert Fathman), and the Center for Effective Discipline (Nadine Block). Each of these organizations helped to educate the public and promote the use of nonviolent childrearing. However, the Ohio Coalition stood out as particularly successful because it succeeded in convincing the Ohio state government to ban CP in schools in 2009 (Block, 2013). Since that time, new social media-based organizations have been established

(e.g., U.S. Alliance to End the Hitting of Children [U.S. Alliance, endhitting.org], StopSpanking.org, and Parentingbeyondpunishment.com).

These volunteer organizations have operated independently and on “shoestring” budgets. Our current efforts are intended to address those shortcomings by creating a coalition of proponents, developing a national strategy, and establishing a concrete and measurable set of objectives with the initial goal of reducing CP and the secondary goal of ending CP in all schools and homes in the U.S.

The National Summit to End Corporal Punishment

Building upon recent developments in the field of violence to children as well as more than 50 years of research documenting the ineffectiveness and unintended negative consequences of CP, three organizations—APSAC, The Foundling, and the U.S. Alliance—joined forces to cosponsor the National Summit to End Corporal Punishment in the United States.

On October 12 and 13, 2017, with funding from The Foundling and held at their headquarters in New York City, the summit brought together 37 of the leading national experts and researchers in the field of child maltreatment and violence to children, including representatives from national professional organizations and social change agencies. Summit participants included representatives from the American Academy of Family Physicians, American Academy of Pediatrics, American Medical Association, American Psychological Association, Gundersen National Child Protection Training Center, National Alliance of Children's Trust and Prevention, National Association of Pediatric Nurse Practitioners, and Prevent Child Abuse America.

The idea for the summit was inspired by the APSAC policy statement released in 2016 calling for the “*elimination of all forms of corporal punishment and physical discipline of children in all environments, including schools and at home* (APSAC, 2016).” APSAC committed itself to take direct action in informing professionals, parents, and the general public about the risks corporal punishment poses to children. The

summit sponsors were also aware of the successful international efforts to end corporal punishment. To date, 54 countries from around the world have passed legislation to prohibit corporal punishment in all settings and many more countries are considering prohibitions.

The decision was made by summit planners to focus efforts on changing parent attitudes and behavior rather than advocating for laws banning corporal punishment in the home. The consensus among the summit planners was that corporal punishment in the United States continues to be a controversial issue especially within certain faith-based communities and cultural groups. It was decided that attempts to pursue legal bans in homes would be counterproductive and unsuccessful at this time. However, because the practice of corporal punishment in schools is still legal in 19 states, summit planners agreed that one of the priorities would be advocating for the ban of corporal punishment in schools in the states where it is still legal.

Additionally, the decision was made to focus summit efforts on changing social norms as a determinate of corporal punishment behavior. The summit planners invited representatives from social change agencies to inform participants about social change strategies. Social change agencies attending the summit included the Family Room, Fenton Social Change Agency, The Montana Institute, and Rain Barrel Communications.

The planners agreed that invitations to participate in the summit would be sent to individuals and organizations that supported the goal of ending corporal punishment in the United States. Individuals and organizations invited to participate in the summit were determined on the basis of their contribution to field of violence to children or their potential to influence an end to corporal punishment. The broad strategy would be to plan the first coordinated national campaign aimed at ending corporal punishment in the United States.

In the fall of 2016, a steering committee was formed consisting of 17 prominent researchers and advocates in the field of child maltreatment. The steering committee's agenda was to help identify summit goals, select summit participants, design a 2-day summit program of tasks and activities, and to plan the logistical

supports needed to ensure a smooth running and effective summit. To work more efficiently, the steering committee formed a smaller executive committee consisting of five representatives from the three sponsoring organizations. The executive committee assumed primary responsibility for the planning of the summit and periodically reported back to the steering committee for feedback and final decision making.

The executive planning committee consisted of Mel Schneiderman, Senior Vice President of the Vincent J. Fontana Center for Child Protection of the New York Foundling and APSAC Board member; David Corwin, Child Forensic Psychiatrist and Clinical Professor at the University of Utah School of Medicine and APSAC President-Elect; George Holden, Chair of Psychology Department at Southern Methodist University and U.S. Alliance President; Stacie LeBlanc, Attorney and Executive Director of the New Orleans Children's Advocacy Center a program of the Audrey Hepburn CARE Center of Children's Hospital and APSAC Vice President, and Viola Vaughan-Eden, Associate Professor and PhD Program Director with The Ethelyn R. Strong School of Social Work at Norfolk State University and APSAC President Emerita.

The Summit Goals

The executive committee met on a biweekly basis and formulated goals that were presented to the steering committee for approval. The primary goal of the summit was to develop a multiyear, multidimensional national strategy to end corporal punishment in the United States. In addition, some specific goals included the following:

- Create the framework for a national public health/social media campaign to end corporal punishment.
- Conceptualize the creation of a coordinating body to train professionals, educate parents, and disseminate information about evidence-based parenting programs.
- Develop a systems approach for the prevention of corporal punishment incorporating, but not limited to, No Hit Zones (NHZ).

The Summit Format

The summit was designed to help participants consider

and think “outside the box” about how to achieve the strategic goal of ending CP in the United States. Presentations were brief and informative, and the majority of time was given for small and large group discussions.

On the morning of the first day, following introductions, six brief presentations set the stage to ensure all summit participants had sufficient information to engage fully in the first day’s discussion about how to create a strategic campaign to end corporal punishment. Joan Durrant spoke about the lessons learned from the international community’s efforts to ban CP. George Holden, who helped organize two prior conferences on corporal punishment, discussed the history of the movement to end CP in the United States. Elizabeth Gershoff, a prolific researcher in the area of corporal punishment, summarized the state of the science on CP. Robert Sege reported on the American Academy of Pediatrics’ upcoming policy statement recommending parents do not use physical punishment to discipline their children.

Jeffrey Linkenbach, Director of The Montana Institute, and Jennifer Hahn, Executive Vice President of Fenton, a social change agency, informed participants about best practices and campaign strategies. Linkenbach spoke about Kotter’s 8-Step Change Model and the four key elements of a successful strategic campaign—spirit, science, action, and returns. Jennifer Hahn outlined the ten essential components of a successful advocacy campaign.

In small and large group discussions, summit participants were asked to discuss what are the elements needed for a campaign to end corporal punishment, what is the spirit or emotional tone that might be most effective, what is a realistic timetable for our efforts, what are the roles needed and who will occupy those roles, and what are the metrics we would want to evaluate a successful effort.

On that afternoon, George Carey, founder and CEO of the Family Room, led summit participants in a discussion about the key hurdles to developing an effective strategy. He tasked participants to create a campaign strategy that speaks to the family’s heart not its head. Carey outlined four approaches to creating

such a campaign strategy. Small and large group discussions then focused on what matters most to parents on an emotional level in our target audience, what passion points are at the top of parents’ emotional spectrum, and how we can build a link between our goal to end CP and the core needs of parents.

Victor Vieth, founder of the Gundersen National Child Protection Training Center at Winona State University in Minnesota, spoke about the challenges from faith-based communities. Then, award-winning journalist, author, and child advocate Stacey Patton, Assistant Professor of Journalism at Morgan State University in Maryland, gave an impassioned talk about the challenges from African American communities. Stacie LeBlanc then discussed the challenges of changing the attitudes of parents holding an authoritarian childrearing dogma.

The final discussion of the day focused on the national strategy—what resources are needed and what action steps are necessary to create a national campaign to end CP. No Hit Zones were suggested as an important way to educate parents and professionals about the harms of hitting.

On the second day, Robert David Cohen, Co-Director of Rain Barrel Communications, led the discussion about public health/social media campaigns. The purpose of a public health/social media campaign is to shift attitudes about corporal punishment by raising awareness to its negative impact and offering positive alternative disciplinary practices. Small and large group discussions focused on whether the campaign and messaging should be specific to local and regional cultural and faith-based communities or be more general in scope. Questions were asked such as, “Who is the key audience for the campaign, i.e. professionals, general public, parents, or youth?” More important, the summit participants were requested to formulate possible campaign messages that were appropriate and relevant for key target audiences.

In the afternoon, David Finkelhor, Director of the Crimes Against Children Research Center, Codirector of the Family Research Laboratory, and Professor of Sociology at the University of New Hampshire, talked about the pros and cons of organizing and funding

a National Training and Resource Center to end CP. Finkelhor described existing national centers and the many challenges that establishing a national center would entail, including the funding needed to support and maintain such a center. Viola Vaughan-Eden led a discussion about the practicality of creating a national CP center in contrast to alternative models such as creating national alliances among different organizations.

The summit concluded by having participants commit to what they or their organization was willing to do to further the goal of ending CP in the United States. The most striking outcome of the 2-day summit was the enthusiastic commitment made by participants to continue to work toward the goal.

There was an agreement that efforts should continue under the direction of the summit's executive committee. The committee agreed to continue to meet on a regular basis to coordinate future efforts to build a national coalition aimed at ending the physical punishment of children in the United States. The consensus was that activities and tasks could be started right away without funding or a fully established national structure or organization to lead the effort. For example, the movement to increase No Hit Zones is already underway and the new national coalition can provide support and needed resources to expand No Hit Zones across the nation. Finally, The Foundling agreed to donate \$35,000 as seed money to hire a communications (social change) agency to develop a strategic social media campaign plan.

Post-Summit Implementation

In the 18 months since the 2017 Summit, a great deal has been accomplished. Immediately following the summit, a post-summit survey was conducted with participants. Respondents reported feeling optimism and gratitude for the opportunity to experience a shared commitment to ending violence against children. They also felt the summit brought the importance of this issue to the forefront and gave them a renewed motivation to increase their efforts. Open-ended and rank-ordered questions focused on five primary themes: (1) what strategies would have the greatest impact; (2) who should be the target audience; (3) what settings or organizations should energies focus; (4) what methods

are most important for maximum impact; and (5) what are the most effective ways to keep this movement active.

The respondents believed that educating parents, policymakers, and healthcare professionals on the negative risk factors associated with CP and alternatives to parenting would have the greatest impact. They identified parents (57.14%), mental health professionals (50.00%), and pediatricians (33.89%) as the most important audiences as well as professional organizations (53.85%) and hospitals (38.89%) as the best target of this initiative. Furthermore, they believed the most commonly supported strategies for maximum impact include developing a public health/media campaign (43.75%), organizational policy and educational efforts (e.g., No Hit Zones in hospitals; 28.57%), and professional organization statements (25.00%). To that end, they believed the most effective ways to keep the movement active were regular newsletter/updates to keep them aware of progress (50.00%), coalition building (46.67%), and identifying funding sources (41.67%).

Mindful of the survey responses, the executive committee used this information to outline next steps. The idea of naming the group going forward resulted in the change from Summit to Initiative (the National Initiative to End Corporal Punishment), knowing that in time and with the assistance of a marketing and public relations firm, a new name might be needed to improve social norms.

The decision was made to open the executive committee to other members with expertise not represented. Therefore, Darrell Armstrong, Pastor at Shiloh Baptist Church in New Jersey, and Robert Sege, Professor of Medicine and Pediatrics at Tufts University and member of the American Academy of Pediatrics Council on Child Abuse and Neglect, were invited to join. More recently, the committee asked Angela Diaz, Professor in the Department of Pediatrics and the Department of Environmental Medicine and Public Health with Icahn School of Medicine Mount Sinai, to become a member of the committee. All three individuals agreed. The executive committee met biweekly for the first year and now continues to meet monthly. In addition to serving on the committee, each member chairs or co-chairs at least one other committee.

Subcommittees and Goals

Based on the themes and strategic goals that emerged from the summit, seven committees evolved:

1. *Resource and Training Committee* is focused on identifying a repository of resources for parents, professionals, and key informants as well as developing and providing web-based training,
2. *Policy Committee* is focused on promoting and partnering with organizations and institutions, from local to national, to draft and adopt statements similar to AAP's, APSAC's, or others that discourage and promote the end of child CP,
3. *No Hit Zone (NHZ) Committee* is developing a toolkit for expansion and implementation of NHZ, identifying and tracking levels of NHZ implementation, registering and mapping existing and potential NHZ, conducting randomized controlled trial (RCT) evaluations of NHZ training videos, and developing an app for implementation of NHZ,
4. *Fundraising Committee* is promoting the membership drive (Ambassador for Children), identifying foundations and other sources of fundraising, and working with a media/public relations agency to develop a marketing plan,
5. *Communications Committee* will work closely with a media/public relations agency to develop the marketing plan, including messaging and branding,
6. *Faith-Based and Cultural Committee* will work to identify, address, and support the distinctive concerns and needs of communities of color, religion, and faith,
7. *Evaluation Committee* will identify appropriate methods to measure progress of the National Initiative and to identify outcomes variables.

To date the committees have been successful in accomplishing a number of initial goals. We list a few of them as follows:

- With the mission of bringing together national experts, researchers, advocates, organizations, and individuals to end corporal punishment, we have created an overarching strategic plan for the National Initiative. The primary task

is to change social norms about corporal punishment in the U.S. using a national strategy across the spectrum of prevention as a guide.

- A second meeting with a smaller group of the original participants and others was held in June 2018 at the APSAC Colloquium in New Orleans, where the strategic plan was reviewed and enhanced.
- A panel presentation was also conducted at the 2018 APSAC Colloquium to showcase the National Initiative and discuss the goals, purpose, and outcome of the 2017 Summit.
- In collaboration with the U.S. Alliance, software was bought and a membership drive implemented (Ambassador for Children). The membership drive's goal is to enlist 5,000 individuals to pay \$25 for lifetime membership in the campaign to end CP.
- APSAC-New York State Chapter, The Foundling, and the Child Abuse Medical Provider Program (CHAMP) has completed a two-part webinar series for health professionals. The state APSAC chapter is currently planning a drive to enlist 100 New York State organizations to endorse APSAC's policy statement on CP.
- Stacie LeBlanc and colleagues have created a No Hit Zone Toolkit and have expanded dissemination and training on its use across the country.
- A request for proposals (RFPs) was sent out to social change agencies to respond with a strategic plan to implement a public health campaign to end CP in the U.S.
- With funding from The Foundling, a media firm was hired to create a comprehensive communications plan for catalyzing the movement.
- Two foundations have been identified that have an interest in funding a campaign to end CP in the U.S.
- The Foundling is planning to hold national webinars on CP.

2019 Goals

In addition, each subcommittee identified goals for the

coming year:

1. Develop or identify annual national survey to determine parental attitudes regarding CP (Evaluation Committee),
2. Increase the number of No Hit Zones across the nation by 50% from 50 NHZ to 75 NHZ (No Hit Zone Committee),
3. Enlist 2,500 Ambassadors in 2019 (Fundraising Committee),
4. Launch an initiative to end CP in New York State. Enlist 100 New York State organizations to support AAP and APSAC policy statements regarding CP (APSAC-NY & Fontana Center),
5. Identify national organizations to support AAP and APSAC policy statements regarding CP. Enlist 50 national organizations (Policy Committee),
6. Develop a social media strategy to end CP. Identify funding needed to support the hiring of communication group to help launch a social media campaign (Communications & Fundraising Committees),
7. Utilize the U.S. Alliance's website to be the repository for resource materials for professionals and parents. Identify and vet appropriate materials and resources (Resource and Training Committee),
8. Develop webinars, workshops, and online training for professionals on current research and how to help end CP in the U.S. (Resource and Training Committee),
9. Develop workshops and interventions for parent groups to help change parent attitudes and behavior (Resource and Training Committee).

AAP Statement and Op-Eds in Response

A major triumph in the movement was accomplished by Sege and his colleagues at the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) when they released a new policy statement in November 2018, entitled *Effective Discipline to Raise Healthy Children*. AAP is a professional association of 67,000 pediatricians whose mission is “to attain optimal physical, mental, and social health and well-being for all infants, children,

adolescents and young adults (AAP, 2019).” This is their first updated guidance in 20 years advising parents on effective discipline. Based on the extensive research studies, AAP concluded that corporal punishment is not only harmful to child development but also places children at risk of more severe harm without evidence of improving behavior (Sege, Siegel, & the Council on Child Abuse and Neglect, Committee on Psychosocial Aspects of Family and Child Health, 2018).

In response to AAP's policy, a number of organizations issued statements of support, including APSAC, The Foundling, U.S. Alliance, and the National Partnership to End Interpersonal Violence. Of significance, the policy committee of the National Initiative organized and managed to get dozens of op-eds published in major news outlets across the country.

What You Can Do

As a member of APSAC or a professional committed to ending all forms of child maltreatment, or both, we expect that you are supportive of this movement. But, we hope you will do more than just nod your head in agreement. Following are a few of the concrete action steps you can take to promote the movement.

- Join the Ambassador for Children drive (www.endhitting.org). For only \$25.00 you can become a Lifetime Ambassador, although there are options for contributing more. Our initial membership goal for the Ambassador drive is 1,500 people. Besides adding your name to the membership list, the Ambassador drive will allow us to identify and then communicate with advocates in various parts of the country and in different professions. That information will be particularly helpful when we establish legislative efforts to end CP in the 19 states that still allow CP in public schools.
- Educate yourself about the problem of CP. There is no shortage of published research articles on the topic, and hundreds are published each year. Recent four-page research summaries can be found in Grogan-Kaylor, Ma, and Graham-Bermann (2018) as well as Durrant and Ensom (2017). More in-

depth reviews of the research can be found in Gershoff and Grogan-Kaylor (2016) and Gershoff et al. (2018).

- Talk to friends and neighbors; spread the word. For those involved in faith-based communities, speak to your spiritual leader, such as a minister, pastor, priest, imam, or monk (see the article by Victor Vieth, 2019, in this issue)
- One way to help inform the public and change opinion is to write an op-ed, letter to the editor, or blog. But you can also influence your social network through Instagram or Facebook postings, for example.
- If you happen to live in one of the 19 states that still allows school CP, write to your state legislators. Each year, a number of states introduce bills that restrict or try to ban school CP. Your voice can help.
- For those working in organizations, consider advocating for an anti-CP statement or policy, or a No Hit Zone (NHZ). See the article about NHZs by Stacie LeBlanc and colleagues (LeBlanc, Alexander, Mastrangelo, & Gilbert, 2019) in this issue.
- Members of APSAC state chapters can

organize an initiative to end CP in their state. Contact APSAC to find out how.

- Finally, help promote the anti-CP movement by donating your time. You can join one of the seven committees or become a leader in this effort. Contact any one of the authors of this article for more information.

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