




# Report on Physical Punishment in the United States: What Research Tells Us About Its Effects on Children

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This report was developed in conjunction with **Phoenix Children's Hospital, Child Abuse Prevention**  
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A full copy of the report is available for download at <http://www.phoenixchildrens.com>



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## Executive Summary

The main goal of this report is to provide a concise review of the empirical research to date on the effects physical punishment has on children. This report was created for parents and others who care for children, professionals who provide services to them, those who develop policy and programs that affect children and families, interested members of the public, and children themselves.

### Research Highlights

This report synthesizes one hundred years of social science research and many hundreds of published studies on physical punishment conducted by professionals in the fields of psychology, medicine, education, social work, and sociology, among other fields. The research supports several conclusions:

There is little research evidence that physical punishment improves children's behavior in the long term.

There is substantial research evidence that physical punishment makes it more, not less, likely that children will be defiant and aggressive in the future.

There is clear research evidence that physical punishment puts children at risk for negative outcomes, including increased mental health problems.

There is consistent evidence that children who are physically punished are at greater risk of serious injury and physical abuse.

### Conclusions

The mounting research evidence that physical punishment of children is an ineffective parenting practice comes at a time of decreasing support for physical punishment within the United States and around the world. The majority of American adults are opposed to physical punishment by school personnel. An increasing number of Americans (now at 29 percent) are opposed to physical punishment by parents. At the same time, there is a growing momentum among other countries to enact legal bans on all forms of physical punishment, bolstered by the fact that the practice has come to be regarded as a violation of international human rights law.

There is little research evidence that physical punishment improves children's behavior in the long term. In contrast, there is substantial research evidence that physical punishment puts children at risk for negative outcomes, including increased aggression, antisocial behavior, mental health problems, and physical injury. The clear connections between physical abuse and physical punishment that have been made in empirical research and in the child abuse statutes of several states suggest that reduction in parents' use of physical punishment should be included as integral parts of state and federal child abuse prevention efforts.

