

## BlueWolf: Taking on misguided theories on raising children

Contributed by James BlueWolf  
Sunday, 22 February 2009

The discipline of children is a controversial topic today.

I recently saw an article describing the negative effects of corporal punishment on children — likening it to child abuse. It said that it teaches violence, destroys self esteem, and generally demeans both parent and child.

This is just another example of the twisted values of today's generation of misled theoreticians. To support this point of view I'd like to quote an article written by a psychologist and 40-year veteran of our educational system, Mr. Don Henthorn, entitled, "There's Research And Then There's Research."

"I've been a psychologist for almost 40 years, also a teacher, guidance counselor, and administrator. In my opinion, the research (relied upon today) is patently false. The research designs are seriously flawed. Using similar methods I could produce studies proving that corporal punishment inflicted by loving parents takes far less time and is far more effective. In social studies today, little valid information comes from research because examination of all the variables is politically incorrect. Many present day researchers have never passed Methods of Research 101, let alone advanced classes. They start with the flawed presumption that children have an advanced capacity to understand the need to behave similar to adults. Children see it quite differently. They view these methods as a sign of weakness. They feel in control with no fear of consequences. Today, drugs are often used as last-resort correctives.

"The phrases 'authoritative discipline' and 'positive behavior intervention' are too fuzzy and nebulous to get hold of. Parents and principals will tell you they get zero results with children who need discipline the most. With both parent(s) working, time outs, withholding of rewards, serious talks, etc., can not be utilized consistently because parents simply aren't there when they need to be!

"Proponents of these 'theories' fail to make a distinction between abuse and loving punishment because they have a skewed perspective as to what constitutes violence. When spanking was common, experiential data shows there was far less abuse of children and women. Communities took an active role in disciplining abusers, and physically corrected children had love and respect for their parents. We need town meetings to examine public opinion and historical perspective rather than relying on questionable experts. Also police and protective services should not give credence to theories based on dubious research."

Many Indian tribes were able to enforce discipline through social pressure, but only because they shared similar values and lifestyles. Today, we don't have any social pressures to speak of. There is no greater family and few of us care what our neighbors think.

Native peoples never struck their children. Our society did without such punishments because the tribal communities' social pressures were significantly more powerful in controlling and directing acceptable behavior than the splintered and unsupported American family of today. Many native peoples did have warrior societies that occasionally disciplined adults corporally to insure their compliance, but the most dominant method of force was the threat of humiliation or ostracism.

Today, our citizens share so many different moral and ethical codes that, despite a certain nostalgia and belief in a moral majority, no common morality or value guidelines exist. Without powerful social pressure to encourage citizens to live by a common code, and without the threat or fear of corporal consequence to take its place, there remains only the weak and vacillating exhortation to "behave," "grow up," "come to task," etc. These gobbledy-gook encouragements are part of the poorly theorized, improperly studied precepts of educators, sociologists and parents catering to the whims of undisciplined "experts."

Looking to nature, every species has to discipline its youth as they push the envelope of willful behavior. This is a natural process toward maturity, but first attempts begin long before the individual has reached a level of intellectual maturity to find a motivation for correct behavior.

Animals are quick and decisive in dealing with this "testing" by their young. Fear of pain is their most effective teaching tool. The quickest way for a child to learn not to touch a hot stove is for them to burn their fingers. The consequences of one's actions are learned behavior starting with a young child's first attempts at self reliance.

From those early falls is born a sense of caution; from burned fingers comes a respect for fire. Obviously there is the potential for injury, even fatality, from experimentation — and parents are forced to take more drastic measures to insure children will not take unknown risks simply because they are not yet familiar with the consequences.

When it comes to survival, discipline is fairly easy to accomplish, but social discipline is more difficult. The reasons to "behave" and the benefits of appropriate behavior are not as clear-cut.

As children, most of the baby boom generation was subjected to the "rod" theory, and looking back now, it was pretty effective. We understood that this "discipline" was not from anger and knew that our parents and other adults had our best interests in mind. Since we were also shown sufficient affection, understanding and praise by these same individuals, it was neither demeaning or destructive to our self-esteem. We observed it in nature, and knew it to be a natural occurrence.

Fifty years ago, with corporal punishment a regular form of consequence for undesirable behavior in children and even young adults, it was safe to walk down any street, leave your car and house doors unlocked, and trust your children to do exactly as they were asked — most of the time. Though we had this closet type of violence in every home, society itself was relatively violence free and, if it occurred at all, it was dealt with immediately and harshly.

Today in our more "enlightened" society, where any kind of corporal punishment or spanking is deemed a

first cousin of child abuse, and where even verbal correction can be termed a form of abuse, violence is at an all time high. Society demands it for entertainment and in many places the common citizen no longer feels safe in their own home.

Family temperament, volatility and atmosphere create different personalities and a need for different types of discipline. One solution does not fit every child. But the concept that one can appeal to a disturbed young person's "good sense" to "behave" denies the basic nature of all species to indulge themselves in selfish behavior and test the limits of social control. Only a few species have the social constructs to successfully discipline without corporal adjustment and the only ones successful on this continent were determined to be ignorant savages!

What can be done with young people who, for whatever reason, are simply too willful to be controlled with words or threats that do not have physical pain lurking around to back them up? While their parent(s) may be abusive, disinterested or just afraid the neighbors will call protective services, these youths (usually male) are used to all the disciplinary measures currently in favor and are unfazed by their application. It only takes only one or two of these "fearless" children to infect a classroom or group with disruptive behavior.

Anyone who has children knows that the time line for effectively teaching discipline is short indeed. If we miss our opportunity during early development, we allow unbalanced children to develop an unnatural acceptance of misfortune in their lives. The result? They have little fear of consequences and even "fear of pain" becomes an ineffective technique. They have "formed" and there is no going back.

We think of today as the age of reason. Many people have the misguided expectation that children will respect and accept verbal direction if it is put to them in a quiet and instructively respectful manner. This is no more true for children than it is for adults.

Take the law for example. If the law did not have teeth in its consequences, even reasonable people would begin to take liberties with it, finding ways of rationalizing their actions to explain their disdain of its observance — like stopping at a stop sign. Everyone knows these signs are put there to direct traffic in a safe manner to protect all drivers. Everyone also knows that even when we can see that there is no clear and present danger, we are still asked to obey — with the consequence of a punishment if we do not. If there were no consequence, individual drivers would begin to bend the law and rationalize their behavior to their own opinions regarding danger.

To find a balance between effective discipline and affection is the test of parenting. We would like to believe that the human animal is evolving into a more enlightened creature — but the state of the world suggests otherwise. Despite paying lip service to grander concepts, the spectacles of sex and death that were rampant in declining Roman society are beginning, once again, to dominate as forms of entertainment for the masses — a sure sign of civilization in decline.

The implication that previous generations disciplined with corporal punishment were somehow damaged, demeaned or improperly treated is ludicrous. Consider the statistics measuring the levels of violence and depression in youth and you will find increases since the advent of these new concepts of discipline.

Talk to anyone born before 1970 and you will find few who consider reasonable corporal punishment to have been damaging to their development, psyche or self-esteem. To say that corporal punishment has no place in the rearing of children in a dangerous world is, in itself, a dangerous theory. The only real argument against corporal punishment today is that today's parents are so imbalanced themselves that they would not administer such punishments in prudent and reasonable ways. But that is a discussion for another day.

Fear forces us to learn many lessons related to facing the inherent dangers found in the natural world. Fear of consequence causes human adaptation. Much of this learned adaptation results directly from pain experienced when we make mistakes that threaten our balance or direction in that world. Corporal punishment, reasonably applied, is one of the more useful tools individuals have for insisting that their experience and wisdom is demonstrated to their children in a way that is certain to guarantee, if not their compliance, their attention and/or survival.

Today's violence is gratuitous and self-serving. Its insidious acceptance into our mediums of entertainment and daily lives affects our children in a much more profound manner than any momentary pain and humiliation they might face enduring a five second spanking. Lack of guidance, self-discipline and success does a lot more to damage the self-esteem of our youth than corporal punishment ever would.

James BlueWolf is an artist and writer. He lives in Nice.

{mos\_sb\_discuss:4}