

DISCIPLINE vs. ABUSE

Most adults can agree that physical abuse occurs all too often with damaging and sometimes deadly results. However, there is less agreement about the dividing line between positive discipline and abuse. Many parents fear that “sparing the rod will spoil the child” while others feel that any form of physical punishment is cruel and ineffective in controlling a child’s behavior.

In attempting to legislate child abuse laws and clarify the problem, state governments are beginning to define abuse in terms of outcome rather than intent. Washington State, for example, defines physical abuse as actions which have lasting physical effects, such as broken bones, burns, cuts, internal organ damage or substantial bruises.

While it is important not to protective child abuse legislation on something as elusive as “intent”. A closer look at intent can help many parents to evaluate discipline measures and guide them towards safe and effective parenting.

DISCIPLINE is designed to help children control and change their behavior. Its purpose is to encourage moral, physical, intellectual development and a sense of responsibility in children. Ultimately, older standard initially presented by parents and other caretakers. In learning to rely on their own resources rather than parents, children gain self-confidence and a positive self-image.

ABUSE, on the other hand, is characterized by its orientation toward satisfying needs or expressing the negative feelings of parents or other caregivers. While it may result in positively changing the child’s behavior, often the improvement is temporary and followed by a later acting out of the hatred, revenge and hostility they have learned from their parents. To avoid further abuse, children may lie, run away or exhibit other forms of avoiding responsibility. Abuse tends to damage the self-esteem of both the parents and the children.

SAFE, EFFECTIVE DISCIPLINE is a correction given in the best interest of the child. In evaluating methods of guiding their children’s behavior, parents or guardians need to ask themselves:

Is the discipline:

- carefully related to the offense?
- administered in the calmness of conviction rather than in the heat of anger?
- fair, weighting heavily in consideration of the child?

- occasional and brief in duration?
- free from physical violence? (Examples are a look of reproach, scolding or the taking away of a valued privilege)