

Topic:

The Ten
Commandments
Of Dating

Millersville
BIBLE CHURCH

58 West Frederick Street
Millersville, PA 17551
717-872-4260

www.millersvillebiblechurch.org
office@millersvillebiblechurch.org

How to raise a juvenile delinquent

The alarm has sounded. “The risk is just too great,” says psychologist Elizabeth Gershoff. What risk? Damage done to children who were spanked by their parents. Expert opinion has once again sent out the warning. Do you want to produce aggressive, anti-social behavior and mental health problems in your children? If you spank them, we are told, you *risk* such consequences.

After five years of analyzing 88 studies of corporal punishment, from 1938 to the present, Gershoff, a researcher at Columbia University’s National Center for Children in Poverty, suggests that spanking could lead to 10 negative behaviors or experiences in children. In writing about her findings, Gershoff wrongly equates laws against hitting adults, prisoners and animals with spanking disobedient children. If Gershoff was merely opposed to violent and abusive corporal punishment, her study could be taken seriously. Instead, her more radical conclusions call into question the objectivity of her work. Some, in the community of experts are less extreme and still endorse mild to moderate, non-abusive spanking as an effective reinforcement of nonphysical disciplinary methods.

Unfortunately, studies like Gershoff’s will further paralyze parents who are already unsure about proper methods for discipline. Reasonable parents will agree that they should not use spanking that is too severe or abusive. But to consider all spanking harmful is misguided. The important distinction to remember is that discipline is not primarily what we do to our children – it is what we do for them. The greater risk to the well-being of children and society is the absence of discipline in our homes and schools.

The studies of corporal punishment combined don’t give as much sound advice to the parents as the ancient

book of Proverbs offers. In it we learn of the need for balanced discipline. “The rod *and reproof* give wisdom, but a child who gets his own way (i.e. an undisciplined child) brings shame to his mother” (Proverbs 29:15). We are also guided to be diligent in our discipline. “He who spares the rod hates his son, but he who loves him disciplines him diligently” (Proverbs 13:24).

Proverbs emphasizes the need to, “Discipline your son while there is hope...” (Proverbs 19:18). Some parents fail to capture valuable opportunities to build character in their children when they are young and open to parental influence. As children grow older, they naturally become more independent and less open to parental direction.

The primary concern of Proverbs is raising children to be wise instead of foolish. Yet this does not happen easily. “Foolishness is bound up in the heart of a child; the rod of discipline will remove it far from him” (Proverbs 22:15). Words alone are rarely able to dislodge the foolishness bound up in the heart of a child. There is a proper place for non-abusive spanking and the absence of such reinforcement stands as the greater threat to children and society.

In contrast with the suggested outcome of spanking, consider Myron Bennet’s formula for raising a juvenile delinquent:

1. Begin with infancy to give the child everything he wants. In this way, he’ll grow up to believe the world owes him a living.
2. When he picks up bad words – just laugh – he’ll think it’s cute.
3. Never give him spiritual training – wait until he’s 21 and let him “decide for himself.”
4. Avoid the use of the word “wrong” –

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it may develop a guilt complex. This will condition him to believe later when he is arrested for stealing a car that society is against him and he is being persecuted.

5. Pick up everything he leaves around – books, shoes, and clothing. Do everything for him so that he will be experienced in throwing responsibility onto others.
6. Let him read any printed material he can get. Be careful that the silverware and drinking glasses are sterilized, but let his mind feast on garbage.
7. Quarrel frequently in the presence of your children and this way they will not be too shocked when your home is broken up later.
8. Give your child all the spending money he wants, never let him earn his own. Why

should he have things as tough as you had them?

9. Satisfy his every craving for food, drink and comfort – see that his every sensual desire is gratified – denial may lead to harmful frustration.
10. Take his part against neighbors, teachers, and policemen. They are all prejudiced against your child.
11. When he gets into trouble apologize by saying, “I could never do anything with him.”

Finally, prepare for a life of grief – you’re definitely going to have one.