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## Second Opinions

### Wishful-thinking paralysis

My two-sentence condensation of Dr. Trumbull's article (April AAP News, "Spanking is an effective disciplinary method"): "Spanking is a historically validated method of child discipline used by the majority of parents. What little information is available from modern studies supports the use of spanking as one component of effective child rearing."

My two-sentence condensation of Dr. Huff's rebuttal (April AAP News, "Using force jeopardizes children's well-being"): "Although I can refute none of the information provided by Dr. Trumbull, spanking violates my sensibilities. Therefore, I will refuse to endorse its use, and hope that the next study, or maybe the next after that, finds some deleterious effect of spanking to validate my reservations, and I will also hope that social scientists will devise some new method for magically raising children without effective discipline, thereby rendering this discussion moot."

How unfortunate that the AAP appears headed for the same wishful-thinking paralysis that has gripped Dr. Huff, while the institution of parenthood dies from lack of support.

How unfortunate that the AAP is unable to make the positive statement to American parents: "We respect you, and we trust you to act, in most instances, in the best interests of your children."

If the American Academy of Pediatrics will not support the authority of American parents, who will?

William Grimes, M.D., FAAP  
Houston, TX

### Emotions shouldn't prompt spanking policy

Dr. Trumbull's arguments defending a parent's use of disciplinary spanking and his call for development of guidelines for its use are well-stated. His position is consistent with prevailing belief and practice among parents and primary care physicians and with available empirical evidence.

Dr. Huff's countering arguments are reflective and moving, but lack empirical research support. Murray Strauss, cited by Dr. Huff, is arguably the most well-known writer in the anti-spanking literature. Strauss, in his often-quoted book, "Beating the Devil Out of Them," promotes the anti-spanking position forcefully. But similarly to Dr. Huff and other anti-spanking advocates, Strauss relies on passionate personal belief rather than scientific evidence. Strauss acknowledges in his book that "... previous comprehensive reviews, the review conducted for this book, and its findings do not prove that corporal punishment has adverse long-run effects."

As Dr. Trumbull points out, Sweden experienced a substantial increase in

physical assaults of children by parents despite a decrease in use of spanking during the years following the legislative spanking ban in 1979. This suggests that attempts to reduce the use of parental spanking are unlikely to lead to any improvement in child abuse rates, and seems to represent an anomaly to the anti-spanking movement.

When one considers the available research, the apparent result of the Swedish experiment might have been predictable. Dr. Diana Baumrind pointed out in her classic research that permissive parents (who used spanking less than authoritative parents) reported that they were more prone to "explosive attacks of rage in which they inflicted more pain or injury upon the child than they had intended." She commented that the permissive parents apparently became violent because they felt they could not control or tolerate the effects of their child's behavior upon themselves. (*Minnesota Symposia on Child Psychology*, Vol. 7, 1973, p.35)

Since the spanking debate so often is emotional and lacks objectivity, empirical research should be the basis for any recommended policy changes on the part of professional organizations such as the AAP. It seems reasonable that guidelines for the appropriate use of disciplinary spanking be developed in the manner that Dr. Trumbull and others have called for.

Non-physical means of dealing with childhood misbehavior should be a major part of an optimal disciplinary approach. Limited research suggests that spanking can be an effective and necessary component of discipline for some children in select situations. The vast majority of parents utilize spanking as part of their disciplinary approach and are able to distinguish between appropriate spanking and abusive hitting. Guidelines would help those who have difficulty making this distinction and would facilitate future efforts to acquire useful research data. Helping the minority of parents who misuse spanking to correct their approach would not "standardize" the practice, as opponents seem to fear, since the practice has long been in widespread use and is supported by the majority of primary care physicians.

S. DuBose Ravenel, M.D., FAAP  
High Point, NC

### Leave the left wing

Alas, the American Academy of Pediatric's leadership has found yet another left-wing cause into which to divert our membership dues: Marian Wright Edelman's Stand for Children march on Washington ("Nation urged to 'come together' for children," April AAP News). Ms. Edelman is one of the chief architects of our modern welfare state, and now she is calling

for more of the same.

Consider these facts: In 1965, the African-American illegitimate birth rate was 22 percent. Today, it hovers between 70 and 80 percent. The Great Society welfare programs have literally destroyed the African-American family.

Virtually every index of child welfare has worsened during the last 30 years: child poverty, single parent households, teen pregnancies, juvenile crime, child neglect and abuse, drug usage and educational failures. This is despite spending \$5.4 trillion collected from responsible, hard-working, tax-paying families who have watched their total tax burden climb to 40 percent of their income. This has forced mothers into the workforce and their children into day care.

Isn't it time for a different approach?

Rodney N. Kreider, M.D., FAAP  
Forest Park, GA

### Preventing head molding

The rise in misshapen heads caused by babies sleeping in the supine position ("Varying position reduces head 'molding,'" April AAP News) was anticipated by me in a letter published in the November 1992 *Pediatrics*. My letter suggested the simple preventive measure of once-weekly reversal of the baby's head-foot orientation during sleep. This would seem to be the easiest positive method of "varying a child's head position during sleep while keeping the child on his back."

Nelson K. Ordway, M.D., FAAP  
Phoenix, AZ

### Poor imagery

I was appalled that Rep. Charles Schumer, a Democrat from New York, chose the following way to describe his point of view in the April *Washington Report*, "AAP opposes deceptive handgun ads": "We now have our crosshairs set squarely on the deceptive marketing ploys of gun manufacturers."

He certainly has good intentions, but what a terrible choice of words! The whole idea of using crosshairs of a gun, to set sights on gun manufacturers, completely defeats the point of view. Is there anybody out there who had the same reaction that I had?

I'm glad to have someone in Congress fighting for this issue. I'm a passionate opposer of handgun ownership. But I'm very disappointed that this man used this choice of words.

In other words, it's not just the gun, but the whole mentality of shooting as a way to settle a dispute. In this case, Rep. Schumer is implying that he's going to set his sights on the manufacturer.

Angela E. Lin, M.D., FAAP  
Westwood, MA