

In Defence of Spanking

For The National Post

The anti-spanking folks have been on a roll this week, arguing that millions of Canadian parents who say they spank their children if necessary, should be pronounced criminals.

If they succeed, we will turn into a nation of domestic spies, despite the obvious fact that the vast majority of parents are responsible mothers and fathers who so deeply love their children they would die for them if necessary.

Legal busybodies use the arguments that there is abuse in the guise of spanking, that all spanking is “hitting,” that it is not “logical” for parents to use violence to stop violence, that spanking causes more violence in society, and that it offends “children’s rights.”

Unfortunately there have always been a very small number of unreasonable, crazy, or besotted parents who beat up their own children. This is a matter of the greatest sadness, and the full force of the law should be used in punishment. But to say we should outlaw all spanking because some parents are rotten, is like saying we should outlaw all policing because some cops are rotten, or all laws because some are badly applied. The first step is to make the right distinctions.

Spanking and hitting have always had opposite motives. The former is reasonable force used out of love and concern for the child to prevent moral and/or physical harm by the child to him or herself, or to others. But except for self-defence, hitting is done out of personal hatred or anger and has no other motive than to harm. It has no moral component. Without this, however, neither spanking nor any other form of discipline or law can have a meaning.

Is it so illogical to spank a child who hits? Well, once we agree that spanking has a crucial moral component that hitting lacks by definition, then when all else fails it is legitimate to use a small pain now, a moral reminder, to prevent a greater future pain. Pre-emptive pain is a universal concept justified in law. It is used within nations and between them all the time to prevent catastrophes and rebellions, and all criminal law relies utterly on the fear of pre-emptive pain. A spanking is just a form of pre-emptive pain used within the home to prevent a more painful domestic rebellion.

As for the belief that spanking begets violence? When we stop spanking, which is moral, we get violence, which is not. The best litmus-test is the public schools. Thirty years ago spanking as pre-emptive pain was widely accepted and there was almost zero violence in the schools. It was suddenly eliminated, and now we have a rampant hard-drug trade in our schools, as well as the widespread use of knives, guns, gang wars, and even the tragic beating, stabbing, and shooting of other students and teachers. A public school is now the most dangerous place to leave a child. Many schools require full-time uniformed officers on premises. A lot of teachers

wear alarm buzzers to call for protection. In other words, as soon as we stopped spanking the kids... they started beating us.

What about the rights defense? Children are a special class of human being because they are naturally dependent on their parents for protection and care. Their rights are largely political, invented by others, and defended by third parties on their behalf against their own parents. The oft-cited Convention on the Rights of the Child, for example, grants children things like rights of association, of privacy, of information, and security of the person. But no one knows whether this means your fourteen year-old child has a right to “associate” with a forty-year old lover against your wishes, to stash drugs in the “privacy” of a bedroom in your house, to receive “information” such as hate mail or pornography, or to get pregnant and command a tax-funded abortion without parental knowledge under the guise of “security” of the person. The only thing we know for certain about so-called children’s rights, is that they represent a huge career opportunity for lawyers, social workers and bureaucrats eager to regulate more of the private life of society formerly off-limits to their ambitions.

On this note, a recent BBC documentary showed historians discovering with astonishment from newly-released documents that most of the oppressive and ultimately very dangerous social control in National Socialist Germany was unofficial. It was sufficient simply to pass a law. Immediately, very ordinary Germans, in a mood of elated moral superiority, began a nation-wide orgy of snooping and spying on their neighbours, turning them over to the local Gestapo for things they found offensive. Like who they slept with. Or how they treated their own children.

Last week, on a TVO show about spanking, I debated Cheryl, a lawyer who is busy arguing before the court this week that all spanking is without exception violent child abuse. I asked her point blank whether or not, if she saw her dearest friend spank her defiant child, she would call up the police and have her friend locked up?

She had a lot of trouble answering. She said she would “discuss it” with her friend first. I said, Cheryl, once you criminalize all spanking, there is no discussion possible. C’mon Cheryl, I persisted: Would you have your best friend locked up, or not?

She refused to answer.

But I think we know the answer.

[Addendum: By 2009 many Canadian public schools (never heard of this in a private school) had SROs, or “School Resource Officers.” That is doubletalk for “Cops in Schools,” the title of a column by Christie Blatchford who wrote that 22 Toronto schools now have fully-armed SROs on location. Some 15% of students have been “threatened with weapons” at school, 20 %

“admitted bringing a gun to school,” and ... 80% said they “would not report crime, even against themselves,” likely for fear of reprisal (*Globe and Mail*, Sept. 9, 2009).]

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