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Hey Dad, How do You Handle Your Kids Mistakes?

By Mark Brandenburg MA, CPCC

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One of the most difficult parts of being a father is learning to accept your children's mistakes. It certainly can be easy to be loving, supportive, and helpful when your children are mistake-free, but most fathers who are paying attention don't find too many mistake-free periods of their children's lives.

Let's be clear about our kids and their mistakes. There aren't too many kids who get up in the morning, rub their hands together and say, I wonder how I can screw up today and really bother my dad! Kids don't enjoy or want to make mistakes, it's just one of the ways that they learn about the world.

Kids usually try to do their best; but they're doing their best considering the resources they have at the time. Sometimes they're tired, sometimes they're easily distracted, and sometimes they're strong-willed, but they generally do the best they can. It's quite easy for us to unfairly judge them according to their best efforts in the past.

When our kids make mistakes, we have choices to make. Fathers can either make choices that help to create kids who are defensive and who lie to them ...or they can make choices that help to create kids who can learn from their mistakes and improve upon them.

Kids who fear punishment or the loss of love in response to their mistakes learn to hide their mistakes. These children live in two different places—one place where they have the love and support of their father (parents), and another where they feel that if their mistakes were discovered, they would be undeserving of that love. It's hard for these kids to fully accept their parents' love and support even when it is expressed. It's also difficult for these kids to set high standards for themselves, because they tend to be fearful of failing.

These are some ideas for fathers who are committed to helping create kids who can learn from their mistakes, and who are not afraid of making a few:

Absolutely accept the notion that your kids are doing their best, and that they'll learn faster about their mistakes if they are in an environment that accepts mistakes.

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Understand that your difficulty with your kids' mistakes is in fact a reflection of your difficulty dealing with your own mistakes; be aware of this and deal with your own issues first.

Know the shaming messages that we can all give so easily to our kids—messages that can do a lot of damage to them and help them to feel unworthy. Here's a few of them:

- How could you have done that?
- You don't listen to me!
- You can do better than that!
- What's the matter with you?

Keep providing your kids with learning experiences, but at the same time structure their environment

so they can't make too many mistakes (having expensive glassware around the house where children might break it is not their fault).

Provide a great model for your children by the way you react to making mistakes: do you get defensive and stretch the truth, or do you own the mistake and learn something from it? Create a culture that's based on learning from mistakes.

We only have one chance to show our kids the patience and discipline necessary to allow them to learn from the mistakes that we've all made. Your opportunity to improve just started now; give your kids the room that they need and deserve.

Mark Brandenburg MA, CPCC, is the author of *25 Secrets of Emotionally Intelligent Fathers* (http://www.markbrandenburg.com/e_book.htm#secrets). For more great tips and action steps for fathers, sign up for his FREE bi-weekly newsletter, *Dads, Don't Fix Your Kids*, at <http://www.markbrandenburg.com>

Spare the Child, Ditch the Rod

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This philosophy's been around a long time.

In fact, a study done by Zero to Three, a nonprofit child-development group, found that 61 percent of the adults who responded condone spanking as a regular form of punishment. The percentage of parents who actually use spanking is believed to be much higher.

And when my five year old son's behavior went

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beyond annoying a few days ago, I felt inclined to join the majority and swat him to "teach him a lesson."

Most parents reach this point with their kids. We feel as though we can't take any more of what our kids are dishing out. It usually happens when we're tired, stressed, and overdone.

So what are our choices when we reach this point?

Spanking certainly can take care of things quickly and can temporarily change your kids behavior. But there are many reasons to question the practice of spanking your kids. Here's five of them:

1. Do you really want your kids to be afraid of you?

Kids will sometimes obey more readily when they're afraid of you. Is this what you really want? What happens when they're six feet two and two hundred pounds? Effective parenting is based on love and respect, not fear.

2. Spanking shows your kids that you lack self-control

The huge majority of spanking incidents come when a parent is angry. What is quite clear to your child is this: when my Dad or Mom gets angry, they hit me. And when the same child hits his sister when he gets angry, do you demand that he shows

better self-control?

Something's wrong with this picture. We teach our kids best through our own actions.

3. You may breed resentment and anger in your kids

Kids who are spanked usually don't learn a great deal about "correcting" their misbehavior. They don't usually sit up in their rooms and say, "Gosh, I can really see after getting spanked that I was wrong. I'll do better now." They do think about how angry their Dad or Mom is, and they can

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develop a good deal of resentment for their parents.

4. Spanking shows your kids that "might makes right"

Adults make mistakes in their lives too, right? Can we use our imaginations and feel what it would be like for someone four times our size to pick us up and swat us on the butt? What would we learn from that? Would we feel any injustice? You can bet that your kids are feeling some.

5. Spanking isn't effective in the long run

Parents who are asked why they spank will report that they use it to "teach their kids a lesson," or so they won't misbehave again. Many kids who are spanked will go underground with their misbehavior and become more cunning to avoid being caught. (Wouldn't you?) If you're spanking your kids fairly often, doesn't this show that it's not working very well?

I don't believe that kids who are spanked occasionally are ruined for life. Nor do I believe that spanking is necessary to discipline a child. There are countless examples of disciplined and responsible young people who were never spanked by their parents.

Parents who don't spank their kids use time outs, re-directing, or distracting with their kids. They can pick their kids up and let them cool down, or simply leave the area themselves so they don't do something they'd regret later.

While these methods aren't always perfect, they help to form the foundation of a certain kind of household: One in which violence is not "taught" as a means to better behavior.

After all, we live in a world that's filled with violence.

Can't we provide a place for our kids where there

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isn't any?

Mark Brandenburg MA, CPCC, coaches men to be better fathers and husbands. He is the author of "25 Secrets of Emotionally Intelligent Fathers" <http://www.markbrandenburg.com/father.htm> For more great tips and action steps for fathers, sign up for his FREE bi-weekly newsletter, "Dads, Don't Fix Your Kids," at <http://www.markbrandenburg.com>.



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