

Study: Yelling is as harmful as spanking

By Mari-Jane Williams, Washington Post

It's hard to discipline children. You can't hit them. Timeouts are not effective. Now, a study out of the University of Pittsburgh says yelling at teens and tweens – particularly when it involves cursing or insults – can be just as harmful as hitting. So what can you do?

Remember that the word “discipline” originally meant to teach, so look for opportunities to coach your child, not just punish him for a misstep.

“Discipline implies setting limits and boundaries,” said Vicki Hoefle, mother of six in Middlebury, Vt., and author of “Duct Tape Parenting.” “But the way we do it is, ‘I’m going to punish you when you do something I don’t like.’ It’s a completely wasted moment.”

No one wants to yell at their kids, and we usually feel bad when it happens. But most of us didn’t know it could be as damaging as the spankings we got when we were growing up.

The University of Pittsburgh study released in September looked at 967 middle school students over a two-year period. Those whose parents used “harsh verbal discipline” such as yelling, cursing and using insults were more likely to be depressed or have behavior problems. The study found it was also not effective in getting children to stop what they were doing, and that it was damaging even to children in homes that were generally warm and loving.

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