



press clip

# Smacked children hit their straps in teens

Cheryl Critchley

CHILDREN smacked by their parents may become more successful as teens than those who weren't, according to recent US research.

The Christian Calvin College in Michigan quizzed 2600 teens and found the 75 per cent who were smacked at ages 2-6 performed better on measures such as academic and volunteer work, college aspirations, hope and confidence than those who weren't.

The effect was somewhat negated if the spanking continued beyond 12.

Smacking isn't banned in Victoria but parents risk being reported to police for abuse.

**'There are better ways of teaching children right from wrong'**

— JOE TUCCI

Focus On The Family's Deb Sorensen said it was common sense that a tap on the bum for wilful children, if not done in anger, could help them learn right from wrong. But she agreed other strategies were better for older children.

"It needs to be done not in anger — a single hand on the buttock, or where it's not really going to hurt," she said. "Children love boundaries. They really thrive."

Psychologist Renee Mill said it would be difficult to prove smacking worked, but it could as a "rare tool" for preschoolers.

"When a young child is about to do something dangerous, like putting their hand on a stove, a sharp smack on the hand is a behavioural tool, which associates an unpleasant feeling with their action," she said.

But Australian Childhood

Foundation CEO Dr Joe Tucci said smacking was never acceptable, and other research had found it had no effect or a detrimental effect: "It just doesn't work. There are better ways for teaching children right from wrong."

Family psychologist Dr Janet Hall said smacking was unlikely to work long-term, and was justified only if the child was at risk. "It's likely children will learn from this — do you want your children to hit their kids?" she said.

Calvin College psychology professor Marjorie Gunnoe told *The Sunday Times*: "There are times when there is a job big enough for a dangerous tool (smacking). You just don't use it for all your jobs."

But author and Parentingideas director Michael Grose said other factors might have contributed to the success of effective

parents who smacked. He said: "Physical discipline is not something we condone at school, within our families or any other relationship."

High school teacher Sharon Witt was smacked as a child but wouldn't dream of spanking Josh, 12, and Emily, 9.

Ms Witt, who is writing a book on parenting teenagers, believes "time out", the withdrawal of privileges and grounding are less excessive and more effective.

"It's worked really well with our kids," she said.

"We're trying to teach our kids not to hit each other."

"I can understand if a kid's about to run across the road. But if someone does something wrong and you smack them ... I don't understand how they're going to learn."

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**Non-physical discipline is best:** Emily, 9, and Josh, 12, with mum Sharon Witt who is writing a book on parenting. Picture: ELLEN SMITH