

Parenting Connection

Volume 14 Issue 2

September/October 2017

Spare the Child

“Spare the rod, spoil the child” — It’s in the Bible. Actually, it is a misinterpretation of the Old Testament.

Yet, the practice of corporal punishment remains deeply embedded in the psyche of many parents — especially in the Black community. According to a 2015 Pew Research survey, Black parents are more than twice as likely as White parents and nearly twice as likely as Hispanic parents to use corporal punishment to discipline their children on a regular basis. Black parents see spanking, popping, pinching, and beating as reasonable, effective ways to teach respect and to protect Black children from the streets, incarceration, encounters with racism, or worse.

Dr. Stacey Patton is challenging the cultural tradition of corporal punishment in Black homes. She is building a movement to change this practice and the culture of black family violence.

In her new book, *Spare the Kids: Why Whupping Children Won’t Save Black America*, Stacey Patton explores the deeply embedded practice of corporal punishment for Black children, both within and outside of the home. Dr. Patton weaves together race, religion, history, popular culture, science, policing, psychology, and personal testimonies and connects what happens at home to what happens in the streets in a way that is thought-provoking, unforgettable, and deeply sobering. She draws on decades of research and interviews with adults who suffered corporal punishment during their childhood and traces the history of spanking to European parenting styles that were eventually passed on to Black American slaves. She advocates fiercely against hitting children in any way, as well as the embrace of such parenting tools within Black culture.

Raised by abusive adoptive parents and shuttled from numerous foster homes and youth shelters throughout the State of New Jersey, Dr. Patton is now an assistant professor of multimedia journalism at Morgan State University, award-winning journalist, author, historian, motivational speaker and passionate children’s advocate.

(continued on page 2)

In This Issue

- 1 Spare the Child
- 4 Pamphlet Series Addresses Basic Responsibilities of Parents
- 5 Mass Story Lab: Using Stories to Create Change
- 6 Wanted: Information on Parenting Programs for Incarcerated Youth
- 7 WCCF Is Now Kids Forward
- 8 Editor’s Message

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(continued from page 1)

Her goal is to provide parents, teachers, foster care providers, social workers, law enforcement officials, judges, adoption agencies, child advocates, ministers, and young people from all backgrounds with the tools to better understand the historical roots of corporal punishment against children. She is making the case for transforming this outdated vestige of slavery into healthier, more appropriate 21st-century parenting practices.

Asked by *Ebony* magazine, “Why do you think we hit our children?” Dr. Stacey Patton explained, “People think that hitting a child is a form of teaching. We think it will protect them. And people grow up to invert the violence they experience as children as something that was good, particularly in African-American culture. As a people, we attribute our success to having had our bodies processed through violence and quite frankly what it does is confirm a long-standing racist narrative about Black bodies. The only way to control us, the only way to make us “good,” law-abiding, moral people is with a good whupping. It seems that we unconsciously agree with that narrative.”

In Dr. Stacey Patton’s Opinion piece, “Stop Beating Black Children,” featured in the *New York Times* Sunday Review on March 12, 2017, she took this argument to its logical conclusion:

“My adoptive mother, and generations of black parents like her, honestly believed that whupping children was a pillar of responsible Black parenting . . . I’ve heard many Black people attribute their successes, or the fact that they weren’t in jail, on drugs or dead, to the beatings they received as children.

But if whupping children kept Black people out of prison or safe from abusive cops, there would be no mass incarceration or police brutality. If beatings were a prerequisite for success, Black people would be ruling the world.”

Dr. Patton argues that these assumptions lead to negative consequences. Her extensive research suggests that corporal punishment is a crucial factor in explaining why Black folks are subject to disproportionately higher rates of school suspensions and expulsions, criminal prosecutions, improper mental health diagnoses, child abuse cases, and foster care placements, which too often funnel abused and traumatized children into the prison system.

In her *New York Times* Opinion piece, Dr. Patton sites the outcomes of this type of parenting:

“Today, despite 50 years’ worth of research on the harms of “tough love” parenting, many black parents still see a slap across the behind or a firm pop on the hand as within bounds. But it doesn’t stop there: Statistics gathered by the National Child Abuse and Neglect Data System consistently show that black children are mistreated and killed by their family members at significantly higher rates than children of any other group.

Spare the Kids

WHY WHUPPING CHILDREN
WON’T SAVE BLACK AMERICA



Stacey Patton

author of *That Mean Old Yesterday*

“Without condescension or unnecessary moralizing, this book will challenge your most deeply held assumptions and refute your strongest arguments.”

—Marc Lamont Hill, author of

Nobody: Casualties of America’s War on the Vulnerable, from Ferguson to Flint and Beyond



Between 2006 and 2015, more than 3,600 black children were killed as a result of maltreatment, according to the Administration for Children and Families. That's an average of 360 children a year, three times higher than for other racial and ethnic groups. Many social workers and district attorneys I have talked to say it is not malicious parents intentionally hurting their kids who end up with convictions for child abuse or homicide; it is those who started spanking and escalated as the child got bigger."

Besides affecting the way parents treat their children, having experienced corporal punishment can also shape the way Black men relate to women. Dr. Patton comments, "I interviewed Black men to learn if there was any connection between mothers beating their sons as boys and how they grew up to treat women later in life. I found that many of their stories confirmed what the psychological literature had been saying for decades. These men grow up to have some really ugly attitudes towards women."

The strong stand that Dr. Patton has taken against the parenting tactics used by many parents within the Black community has received some pushback. Some people accuse her of "playing respectability politics, pathologizing black people."

But she argues, "Even with the pushback that I get, my thing is, you're thinking about it. You're angry with me right now because basically I'm telling you everything you've ever been told is a lie. Your momma was a lie; your preacher was a lie; everything was a lie. And that's hard for people. It doesn't mean your parents didn't love you. But they were wrong for doing this to your body, and it's probably impacted you in ways that will make you feel uncomfortable to think about it. I get it; I have empathy for that."

Spare the Kids is not just a book. It is part of a growing national movement that Dr. Patton is leading to provide positive, nonviolent discipline practices to those rearing, teaching, and caring for children of color. Before writing her book, *Spare the Kids: Why Whipping Children Won't Save Black America*, Dr. Patton created Spare the Kids, an online anti-spanking website in 2010. The mission of the website is to combine digital technology, social media, and the basic science of early child development to educate parents and caretakers about the risks and harms of hitting, and to encourage practical peaceful alternatives to aggressive and humiliating punishment.

This site also provides resources for child welfare and juvenile justice professionals, K-12 educators, social workers in training, foster parents, residential counselors, clinicians, advocates and activists seeking to enhance their understanding of how race, power, and privilege impact the parenting practices of their clients and the institutional practices that sometimes result in racial disparities.

Though this site is targeted to Black communities because of the unique cultural and historical specificity of corporal punishment, given the prevalence and acceptance of spanking in American culture, the discussions and resources provided there will be useful to a wide and diverse audience.

As a nationally-recognized child advocate, Dr. Patton travels the country delivering keynotes and professional trainings focused on combating racial disparities in child abuse cases, criminal prosecutions for child abuse, foster care placements, the over prescribing of psychotropic medications to children of color in foster care, the school- and foster care-to-prison pipelines, corporal punishment in public schools, diversion and restorative justice programs.

In addition to corporal punishment, Dr. Patton does presentations that focus on adoption issues, writing and effective communication strategies for direct care providers and foster youth, the role of churches in addressing Black family violence, growing up in foster care, paddling in schools and the school-to-prison pipeline, as well as the history of race and childhood.

For more information about Dr. Stacey Patton, the *Spare the Kids: Why Whipping Children Won't Save Black America* book and the Spare the Kids movement visit www.sparethekids.com.





Pamphlet Series Addresses Basic Responsibilities of Parents

Learnovation is a company that has developed products and delivered services which educate and empower people to enhance their lives since 1995.

Among Learnovation's products are Pamphlet Series in the areas of:

- Workforce Readiness
- Reentry
- Financial Literacy
- Parenting
- Wellness & Nutrition
- Study Skills

Each topic area is comprised of several pamphlets and each pamphlet is:

- Designed to be completed by each client individually
- A four page layout – Not overwhelming, but easy to read and digest, written at a 9th grade level
- Tangible – something that belongs to the client
- A reference tool for reinforcing the message
- Complete with a outcomes assessment tool
- Able to be completed in 30-45 minutes

Learnovation's Parenting Series contains 12 pamphlets that provide best practices and guidelines for developing great parenting skills. The series gives anyone involved in parenting a boost on the key skills needed to interact and connect with kids:

- taking responsibility
- setting boundaries
- what to expect from kids at different ages
- absent parenting
- talking and connecting
- parenting styles
- discipline and conflict
- kids and divorce
- single parenting and step families
- staying healthy
- participating and helping with school
- when kids are in trouble
- getting help when you need it

The pamphlets in the Parenting Series are:

- P1- Life With Kids
- P2- What to Expect as Kids Grow
- P3- Being a Good Parent
- P4- Talking and Connecting With Kids
- P5- Discipline – Rules Are There for a Reason
- P6- Conflict in the Family



- P7- Kids and Divorce
- P8- Single Parenting and Step Families
- P9- Keeping Kids Healthy
- P10- Kids and School
- P11- When Your Kids Are In Trouble
- P12- Finding Help in the Community

To learn more about Learnovation's Parenting Series, go to www.learnovation.com or phone 888-577-1190 to preview the Parenting pamphlets.

Mass Story Lab: Using Stories to Create Change

Mass Story Lab is a community storytelling and design project that uses stories as an instrument of justice. In a Mass Story Lab, the stories of people directly impacted by mass incarceration become the lens through which communities imagine a world beyond prisons and act to transform the justice system.

The Mass Story Lab project seeks to impact communities by:

- Building community
- Generating empathetic listening and dialogue
- Dispelling misinformation about the experience of incarceration
- Activating citizens to take action and help end mass incarceration

As Willie Pettiford, a Storyteller at the Greensboro Story Lab put it, "I think that stories are very useful because you're hearing a part of their life, you're hearing their pain, you're hearing their struggle. Someone hears a story and that sparks a transformation for the justice system."

Story agents participating in a Mass Story event include those directly impacted by incarceration:

- Formerly incarcerated people
- Family members of incarcerated people
- Victims of crime
- Family members of victims of crime

People who can witness the stories and use them to create change in the community include:

- Concerned community members
- People who work in corrections
- Police
- Criminal defense attorneys
- Prosecutors
- Judges
- Social workers
- Re-entry Practitioners
- Educators
- Artists and cultural workers

The Mass Story Lab is already halfway to its goal of reaching 20 U.S communities between 2016 and 2018.
(continued on page 6)



(continued from page 7)

Some of the stories recorded at Story Lab sessions show how the families of those who are incarcerated feel the impact most acutely. Children with incarcerated parents face a plethora of challenges. Those incarcerated find it increasingly difficult to secure successful reentry into their family lives and society.

At the New Orleans Story Lab on April 22, 2017, storytellers talked about how the deep consequences of incarceration on communities begin with the family, often having long-lasting effects on children and how the costs of a parent's incarceration are emotional as much as they are economic.

At the Indianapolis Story Lab on April 29, 2017, participants discussed the challenges of your re-entry, the role of families and community organizations in successful re-entry and the unique needs of people coping with mental illness or substance addiction when they come home from prison.

At the Greensboro lab on November 12, 2016, storyteller Tiffany Bullard spoke of her father who was incarcerated when she was only two years old. She met him for the first time sixteen years later once he was released.

She spoke of the silence and awkwardness they felt, "I met him right after I graduated high school. I remember what it felt like to hate and love him so much. To know that his blood was mine but to feel so cold and very far away from him . . . So much was lost."

Tiffany highlighted the difficulty that her father has faced in terms of reentry back into society after incarceration, and specifically how difficult it has been for the family to connect. "It has been seventeen years since my father's release and there is still a part of prison that follows him around. Reentry is not something that happens overnight. Reentry is not just a program, something to quantify or sell or get funding for. It is deeper than that. Reentry is complicated. It is a holistic lifetime journey with many moving pieces, places and people. It is a process that takes time. Sometimes, a lot of damn time."

Visit www.MassStoryLab.com to find out more about Mass Story Labs and bringing a Story Lab to your community.

Wanted: Information on Parenting Programs for Incarcerated Youth

Youth incarcerated in juvenile facilities are usually legally still children, but some are also parents. Incarcerated teen parents rarely have the opportunity to receive parenting education or visit with their infants despite the proven long lasting benefits experienced by themselves and their children.

Young parents have specific developmental needs. Parenting programs designed for adults may not match those needs.

If your state or county has established a parenting program specifically for incarcerated juveniles who are also parents, others who work with juveniles would like to hear about it. Programs that allow juvenile parents to have their babies with them while they are incarcerated are of special interest.

Any information on parenting programs for incarcerated juveniles would be helpful to those wanting to establish a program in their facilities. If you can help, send information about your parenting program to jerrybednarowski@new.rr.com and it may be shared in a future issue of this newsletter.



WCCF Is Now Kids Forward



For well over a century, the Wisconsin Council on Children and Families (WCCF) organization has focused on improving conditions for families and children through policy change, expanded public investments and public education. This included initiatives to address the needs of children with incarcerated parents and youth involved in the criminal justice system.

Last month, Executive Director Ken Taylor, announced a bold step to ensure his organization is adapting and meeting the ever-changing needs of Wisconsin's children and families. WCCF will have a new name, Kids Forward, and a new tag line, "Every Kid. Every Family. Every Community." The new tag line conveys where they want to go (forward) and who they want to travel with (every kid, every family, and every community).

This step will build upon the organization's great work of the past, and will allow Kids Forward to improve its effectiveness in the future. Kids Forward believe that children need strong voices to represent them. Its mission is to inspire action and promote access to opportunity for every child, every family, and every community.

Kids Forward will continue providing high-quality research, policy analysis, and advocacy focusing on the needs of children and families in Wisconsin. Director Taylor pledges, "Kids Forward is committed to building the best future possible for every child and every family in Wisconsin — notably for children and families of color and those furthest from opportunity. While we have a new name, a new look, and a renewed mission, please know that we're still the same great organization that has been working tirelessly to promote policies that have moved Wisconsin kids, families, and communities forward for 136 years."

Kids Forward will continue to stand up for kids by advocating for:

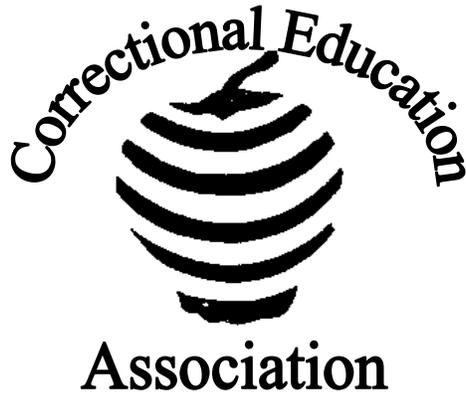
- Investment in a child's earliest years
- Healthier kids and families
- Equitable communities
- Strengthening Wisconsin's workforce
- A level playing field on taxes
- A fair justice system for youth

In addition to the new name, new logo, and renewed mission, Kids Forward has launched a new website, www.kidsforward.net and updated its social media sites. Stay up-to-date with Kids Forward on Facebook at facebook.com/kidsforwardwi and on Twitter.

For past issues of this newsletter, parenting handbooks, program resources, and more go to www.ceawisconsin.org



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Editor's Message:

Of the hundreds of topics discussed in my classes during my teaching years in the Wisconsin correctional system, the two on which my students had the most entrenched attitudes were homosexuality and corporal punishment. Over the years, feelings about homosexuality have evolved somewhat, but stances supporting corporal punishment remain more rigid.

Countless times I heard the comment, "I was whapped and I turned out fine," coming from students dressed in prison fatigues. It was difficult to find the right tone which would encourage the students to examine their attitudes toward corporal punishment.

Dr. Stacy Patton appears to have found the right tone. Recognizing the parent's desire to protect the child from the dangers of the world while tracing the historical roots of corporal punishment back to slavery can crack the door and allow the parent some light to examine their parenting practices.

So visit www.sparethekids.com and learn more about Dr. Patton's message.

Jerry

**Tell Us About Your Program --- Email Your
Article to: JerryBednarowski@new.rr.com**

