

TOP NEWS

THE SPANKING DEBATE

Rick Scruggs, Bow Valley Christian Centre pastor, Calgary Evangelical Ministerial Association:

"Corporal punishment — a hand on the bottom or the wooden spoon — was definitely part of my upbringing, at least until I was older.

"No-one looks back with fondness on discipline, but as (the Bible) says, 'discipline produces a harvest of righteousness' — not a beating, not done in anger, but something that smarts and

reminds of the issues.

"And you can look back and see the good it did," he said.

As a parent, Scruggs said, he has learned that corporal punishment doesn't work with every child, and it doesn't work with older children, but it can be a necessary means of communication with young kids.

Eliezer Segal, University of Calgary professor of religious studies:



"The point was having the threat there, but I don't think it was ever carried out. I think the threat may have been necessary, but that would depend on how I turned out, which I'm not qualified to judge.

"It's a very individual thing. I don't know what counts as a spanking, but I can see where a slap on the wrist or something like it might be the quickest, most expeditious means."

Art Smith, former alderman, MLA, MP, chairman of Alberta Economic Authority:

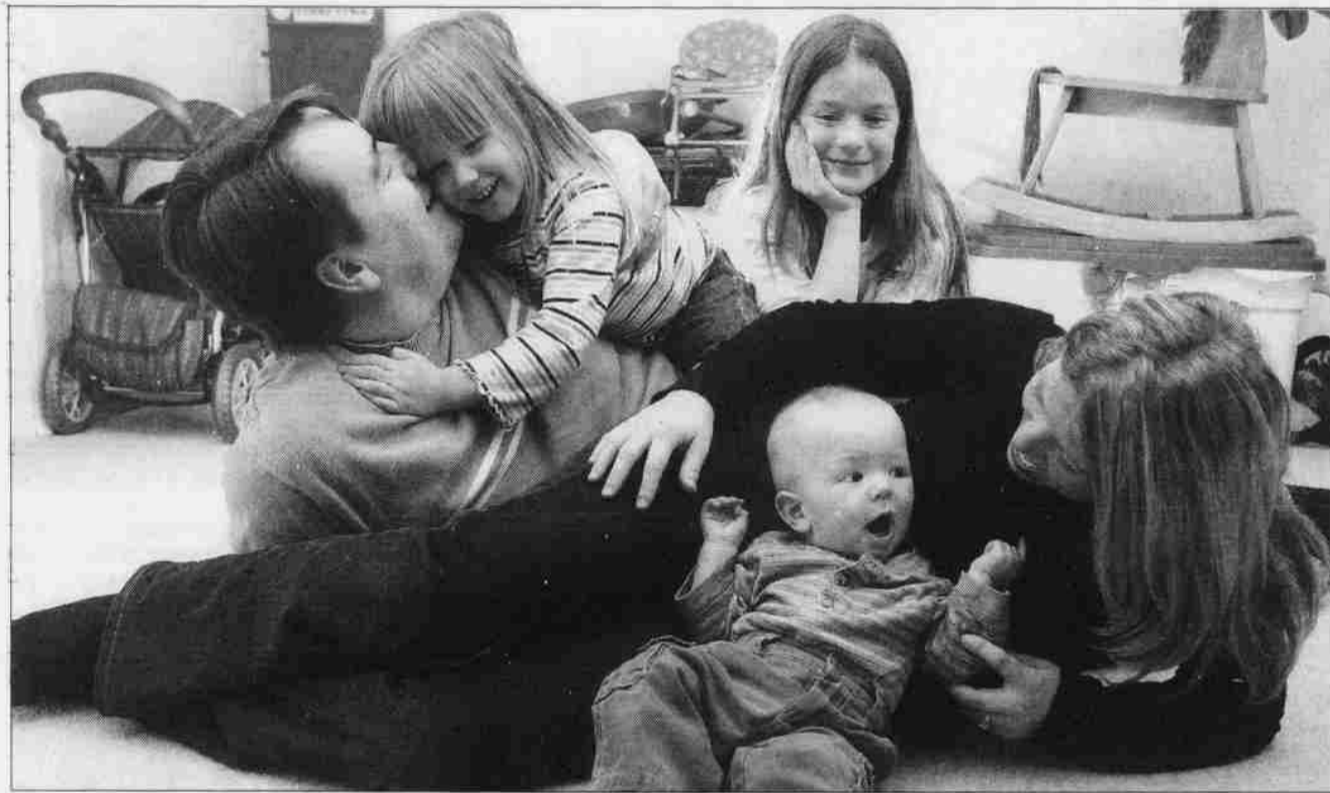


"I went to a private boarding school, where they exercised pretty stiff punishments — they called them defaulters. You got whipped. Two with a birch switch, usually from the headmaster or prefect, all very formal, no joking about it. It was usually for something serious, like smoking. It wouldn't be acceptable today, but it taught me tremendous discipline. And there was no question I needed discipline."

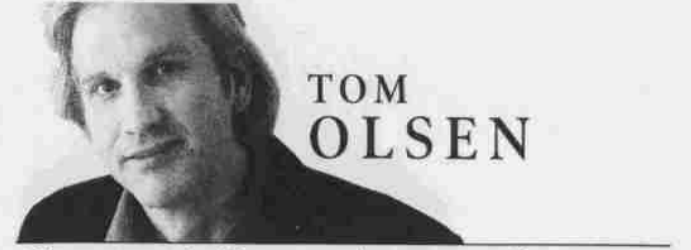


Judy Arnall doesn't believe in spanking children. Friday evening, she was home playing with her children, from left, Marlin, 11, Heidi, 9, Travis, 6, and Christopher, 12, as they all tickle 22-month-old Scotty.

Photos, Marianne Helm, Calgary Herald



Timothy Kingston believes in the option of spanking. Here he is with his family, including his wife, Sheri, daughters Ashley, 9, and Grace, 4, and his son, Daniel, eight months, at his home Friday evening.



TOM OLSEN

CALGARY'S EYE ON ALBERTA POLITICS

Leave parents alone, but watch for abuse

EDMONTON

Shiraz Shariff's mom used to beat him with a rolling pin. "Oh yes, when I was being mean to my sister," says the affable MLA for Calgary-McCall. "I remember her coming after me with a rolling pin. But I haven't turned out to be a bad boy."

The subject is spanking after the Supreme Court of Canada's ruling Friday that says parents have the right to mete out reasonable corporal punishment to keep kids in line.

Shiraz has other colourful stories about corporal punishment, including one from his childhood in Tanzania.

It involved the president of the day — Shiraz can't recall his name — making an example of his own son for some kind of wrongdoing.

"He actually came to the school and used corporal discipline in a public school assembly," says Shiraz, who has been in Calgary for 30 years.

Perhaps surprisingly, neither Shiraz nor his wife have ever spanked their two children, who are now 24 and 18.

"I think we have learned since then that a lot of that doesn't help a child."

But he's quick to defend the rights of others to make a different choice.

"We never had the need to spank our children, but we don't object to other parents doing it," says Shariff. "Parenting is the domain of the family. The government has a role when it becomes excessive and enters into the realm of abuse."

That's largely the opinion of many Tory MLAs. Conservative principles dictate government stay out of your business. So, while many individual Tories are against spanking kids, they won't speak against those who do.

"It's nobody's business, and it sure as hell's not the government's business how I raise my kids," says Lloyd Snelgrove, Vermilion-Lloydminster MLA and father of four.

"I raise my kids properly. I do what's necessary to make sure they respect their elders and live a moral life. I will say this — I don't beat anybody. Kids. Adults. Nobody."

Interestingly, while Alberta's Child Welfare Act acknowledges parents have a right to use reasonable corporal punishment to discipline children, the minister responsible for the act shudders at the thought.

Iris Evans is noted for several things: she works phenome-

nally hard, routinely clocking days that start early and end late; she's accessible, though it's sometimes hard to pull a snappy quote from the long answers she's prone to; and she cares deeply, almost heart-breakingly, for the kids her children's services department is responsible for.

That latter aspect of her personality was displayed on the subject of spanking and the court ruling that it's OK.

"It upholds the rights of parents, but I'd like to see it in the context of a loving and responsible parent," says Evans. "It could be interpreted as 'I can spank my child whenever I like.'"

"As an adult, I don't like the thought of hitting anyone, particularly a child who is the love of my life."

Evans has three sons, all now grown.

She tries to acknowledge there are some circumstances that might warrant a sharp slap, but she has a hard time doing it.

There are other methods, like depriving a child of TV, keeping them home from a birthday party or sentencing them to a period of house arrest, otherwise known as "grounding."

The only time Evans ever raised a hand was when her boys ran onto the street.

"That made the point the road is not a safe place."

They turned out OK. In fact, Evans' son Trent is the ice-maker who embedded a loonie and a dime into the arena ice at Salt Lake City during the 2002 Winter Olympics. The Canadian men's and women's teams both skated to gold medals, and Wayne Gretzky took the loonie into the Hockey Hall of Fame.

Yvonne Fritz is another politician who never raised an angry hand to her children.

"We felt there were other ways to discipline that were just as effective," says Fritz, the MLA for Calgary-Cross. "I just don't believe in spanking."

Again, though. She respects your right to do so.

As does the Supreme Court, even if it ruffles that society is such that the justices saw fit to include guidelines that admonish parents not to beat children about the head with rulers or belts.

Tragically, though, it happens. And worse, sometimes.

Which is why, presumably, the court saw fit to lay out parameters you'd have hoped would be a matter of common sense.

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The pros and cons of corporal punishment

Two views on Supreme Court ruling

LEANNE DOHY
CALGARY HERALD

The Supreme Court decision upholding a parent's right to spank was applauded by those who see it as a legitimate discipline tool, and denounced by others who say it teaches children to solve problems with violence.

"I am pleased that they have upheld the law," said Timothy Kingston, a father of three young children, who says it's a failure of logic to equate corporal punishment with child abuse.

"Unless you can prove that, in the majority of cases, spanking leads to abuse, you can't make that argument. A lot of the anti-spanking folks start off with the assumption that it does, and then they set out to prove it."

Judy Arnall, a mother of five children aged two to 12, countered that spanking is almost always done in anger, demonstrating that lashing out in anger is an appropriate and justifiable reaction that kids will imitate.

Kingston argued a compelling case can be made that spanking is good for society

because, without it, children can end up spoiled, disobedient youngsters "who don't understand the consequences of bad choices."

He said too many parents are more concerned with being their child's friend than providing guidance.

"In our family, we love our children and we never physically abuse them," Kingston said. "We reserve spanking on the bottom for the most grave of offences."

"Once the guidelines and consequences have been set, I guarantee you that the children do not want to cross that line."

Kingston said doing the right thing sometimes involves short-term pain.

"We give our children immunizations," he said.

"I'm sure that in my four-year-old daughter's mind, the shots are wrong, because they hurt. We, as parents, allow children to undergo that pain to protect them in the future."

"It's a nice analogy to spanking, because spanking hurts children both physically and emotionally, and the parents emotionally, but it is ultimately done out of love and concern for their well-being."

Arnall, who teaches parent education classes, argues while spanking may have a short-term positive effect on behaviour, its long-term effects are negative.

"If a parent has used spanking to solve parenting problems, when the child gets to the teen years, that's what they're likely to use on their peers," Arnall said.

She worries the Supreme Court's sanction of spanking will lead to an increase in its use, despite the range of other available discipline methods that are, she says, healthier for the bond between parent and child.

"I have five kids," she said. "I have known moments of such rage, that if I started spanking, I don't know where it would stop, so I've long committed to not ever doing that."

"Every parent has had to deal with that kind of anger, and you have to know when it's time to step back and take some time out."

She disputes that outlawing spanking would have led to rampant prosecutions of parents.

"That's just not true," Arnall said.

"The police have a lot of discretion. Most of the time, spanking would never even be reported because it is done privately, in the home, to kids under the age of five."

Wherever it's done, she calls the law supporting spanking's use archaic and short-sighted.

"I cannot believe that it was upheld," she said.

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Have your say
Do you agree with the Supreme Court of Canada's decision to uphold the spanking law? To vote in our online poll, log onto www.canada.com/calgary

What parents can and can't do

The Supreme Court of Canada says parents can use only "minor corrective force of a transitory and trifling nature." It created a "zone" in which discipline risks criminal sanction. Prohibited actions that are not protected:

- Corporal punishment of children under two or teenagers;
- Degrading, inhuman or harmful conduct;
- Discipline by the use of objects or blows or slaps to the head;
- The gravity of the precipitating event is not relevant;
- The conduct must be corrective, which rules out force stemming from the caregiver's frustration, loss of temper or abusive personality;
- Teachers may reasonably use restraint to remove a child from a classroom or secure compliance with instructions, but they cannot strike or strap.

Lawyers says get ready for 'busybody' complaints

DEBORAH TETLEY
CALGARY HERALD

The reasonable doubt language included in Friday's top court ruling on spanking will trigger a slew of "busybody" cases coming before the courts — and potentially improved protection of children — a local criminal lawyer predicts.

"We are going to see many of these, where Joe Citizen thinks he's seen heavy-handed discipline by a parent in the shopping mall and reports it to authorities," said Earl Wilson.

"These are well-meaning citizens, but they might not know the whole story or circumstances. But we are going to see a spate of these in Calgary and everywhere by kids, aid societies and bystanders. Some of these complaints might even

end up being overblown, but many of them won't be."

While the Supreme Court upheld the Criminal Code defence, dubbed the spanking law, it imposed new legal boundaries surrounding the extent of punishment.

Parents may use minor corrective force without the use of objects — only an open-handed slap. Punishment cannot be given out of anger, cause harm or degrade a child.

The court has outlawed spanking a child younger than two or older than 12.



Earl Wilson

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