



An Open Letter to the Pope

*The US Alliance to End the Hitting of Children*ⁱ shares with Pope Francis the vision of a world in which all children are treated with dignity, respect, and compassion. We support these values because in such a world, every child can grow into adulthood with a generous capacity for love, trust and empathy. However, we were distressed to read of the Pope's remarks regarding the father who "smacked" his children (AP, Feb. 5, 2015). Contrary to the Pope's comment, it is not possible to strike a child while maintaining the child's dignity.

So why is Pope Francis condoning spanking? Pope Francis and too many parents continue to accept the deeply embedded disciplinary behavior of spanking children, without recognizing the long-term physical and mental risks associated with it. Furthermore, spanking is a violation of all children's right to be free from violence.

Over the past 15 years, research into healthy parent-child relationships, brain development, and the effects of early adverse childhood experiences makes it clear that it is *never* OK to hit a child. On occasion, well-meaning parents, using corporal punishment for discipline, inadvertently injure children. Any form of violence against children, *especially* within the context of the parent-child relationship, risks children's well-being.

In response to the science, the consideration of human rights, and other reasons, a number of leading child development organizations and at least two national religious organizations (United Methodist Church & Presbyterian Church-USA) in the US have made formal statements against spanking.

We respectfully request that Pope Francis reconsider the topic based on the research, children's rights, and the teachings of Jesus Christ. Those considerations will lead the Pope to a very different conclusion about the acceptability of spanking.

Catholic parents who want to learn more about how to educate and support the development of our children through healthy attachment and relationship, can go to Catholic Attachment Parenting Corner at: <http://catholicap.com>.

To learn more about the problems with spanking and the alternative of positive parenting, please visit us at endhittingusa.org.

ⁱ *The Alliance to End the Hitting of Children is a 501c(3) organization committed to end the hitting of children in all venues in the United States. Visit us at <http://endhittingusa.org>*