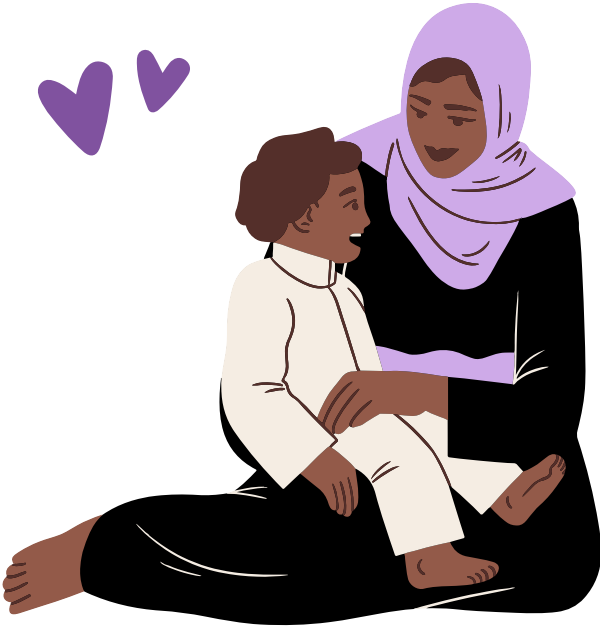


## Parenting Toolkit for Refugee Families

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### Defining Terms

**Child:** Anyone under the age of majority, which is 18 years old in most states (Wex Definitions Team, 2021).

**Corporal Punishment:** The use of physical force which causes the child to experience pain, but not injury, for the purpose of correction or control of the child's behavior (e.g., spanking; Straus, 2000).

**Physical Abuse:** Any use of physical force by one person against another person, with the intention of hurting them, however lightly (e.g., leaves marks or bruises; Hopman & Lobbestael, 2024).

### Parenting and Punishment

Globally, there are differing laws and norms surrounding physical punishment. Punishments that are acceptable in one country or state may be outlawed in another. This creates a problem for newcomer families in the United States, where excessive corporal punishment is non-normative and illegal. Unaware families may utilize corporal punishment and attract unwanted attention from child welfare authorities, which could harm their children and result in removal of children from the home, law enforcement engagement, or even deportation (Fontes, 2017). Newcomer families must understand the drawbacks of corporal punishment and learn alternative disciplinary techniques to protect children from excessive punishment and avoid entanglement in the child welfare system.

- As of 2025, around 1.2 billion children around the globe face corporal punishment at home (World Health Organization, 2025).
- Most physical abuse starts as an attempt to punish or teach the child (Gershoff & Grogan-Kaylor, 2016).
- Caregivers use corporal punishment repeatedly because it leads to short-term obedience, but as children become used to it, the caregiver must intensify the punishment to receive the same desired behavior from the child. Over time, this can spiral out of control (Bridging Refugee Youth and Children's Services, 2006).
- Child welfare authorities view parents who use corporal punishment as using excessive force (Dettlaff & Johnson, 2011).

## New York's Laws

- Unintentional injuries may still be considered abuse, such as when discipline goes too far (Bridging Refugee Youth and Children's Services, 2010).
- NYS law allows caregivers to use corporal punishment to the extent that they believe it is necessary to maintain discipline or to promote the welfare of the child (Penal Law 35.10; Rasmussen et al., 2012).
- For example, it is legal to grab a child's arm to prevent them from stepping into oncoming traffic, but it is not legal to slap a child for talking back.
- Excessive corporal punishment, however, is not legal and may lead to a finding of child abuse (New York Family Court Act, FCA 1012; Rasmussen et al., 2012).
- The United States government may deport immigrant families for child abuse (Fontes, 2017).
- Corporal punishment may attract unwanted attention from authorities, as it is discouraged in the United States (Fontes, 2017).



*No study has found positive effects of corporal punishment, and most studies have discovered negative side effects of corporal punishment (Grogan-Kaylor, 2004):*

- Corporal punishment is linked to children's depression (Afifi et al., 2006; DuRant et al, 1994; Kim & Ge, 2000; Straus, 2000).
- Across cultures, corporal punishment has been tied to children's aggressiveness (Douglas & Straus, 2006; Gershoff, 2002; Gershoff & Grogan-Kaylor, 2016; Hopman & Lobbestael, 2024; Lansford et al., 2005; Strassberg et al., 1994; Straus, 2000).
- Corporal punishment weakens the parent-child relationship in children as young as two years old (Crockenberg, 1987).
- Corporal punishment is linked to slower mental development, which affects children's school performance (Rajalakshmi, 2018; Straus & Paschall, 2009; Tomoda et al., 2009).

## Alternate Parenting Practices

- Reward positive behaviors to reduce the opposing unwanted behavior (UC Davis Health).
- Set limits and reasonable consequences and then follow through calmly; make clear rules and communicate possible consequences (Kumpfer & Brown, 2011).
- Include a response cost, which is the time, effort, or money the child needs to give to "make it right" (Kumpfer & Brown, 2011).
- Set and deliver consequences when everyone is calm.

Here are some common disciplinary techniques utilized in the US:

- Grant teenagers privileges when they obey the rules and remove those privileges when they disobey them.
- Discipline children between the ages of 6 and 12 using rewards and consequences.
- Allow natural consequences to follow the child or teen's behavior.

## National Parenting Resources

- **Resources for Refugee Parents Folder:**  
[https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1SzsU6zvK4IB25vRY1EyyESJBOVxbTTK?usp=drive\\_link](https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1SzsU6zvK4IB25vRY1EyyESJBOVxbTTK?usp=drive_link)
- **Switchboard:**  
<https://www.switchboardta.org/>
- **Understanding Natural vs. Logical Consequences:**  
<https://www.sproutinglittlelearners.com/post/understanding-natural-vs-logical-consequences>
- **Refugee Council USA Resources:**  
<https://rcusa.org/for-refugees/>
- **US Committee for Refugees and Immigrants:**  
(703) 310-1130; [uscra@refugees.org](mailto:uscra@refugees.org);  
<https://refugees.org>
- **HIAS:** 1-800-HIAS-714; [info@hias.org](mailto:info@hias.org);  
<https://hias.org/>
- **International Refugee Assistance Project:**  
<https://refugeerights.org/>

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