

# the regular COLUMN



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## To smack or not to smack...

The word used for hitting children that isn't slapping (face), spanking (bottom), or beating (full-blown rage). The type of lashing out that comes out of the blue, striking any bare flesh available, to release built-up frustration. Excused in terms of exhaustion, exasperation, and impossible children.

In case there's any doubt that 'the occasional smack never did any harm,' I have an up-to-date experience to draw on, reminding me clearly how it was being six. While the world was remembering 9/11, my memory of being struck was jogged by a vicious blow delivered by my mother, by post this time. The place she chose stung - there's enough forethought in a smack to aim - and caught me completely off-guard. Yelp of pain and outrage. Cold dismissal of my protest a second strike. Loss of love and understanding from her of all people unbelievable, unbearable. Sense of joy gone, no point in anything, disconnected, bored and lonely. Growing rage at the waste of sunny days spent recovering from what I'd

done nothing to deserve brought me back. Frustration circulated my body, shooting up and down my arm, my shoulder inflamed with surfacing rage straining to strike back.

Aged six, two, or even younger, when the central supplier of nourishment suddenly turns hostile, the world stops. There's no-one else, compliance is vital. Now I understand the widespread suspicion of dependence I've encountered, and experienced, ever since I began training, working and being a client myself, and the tragic deep mistrust of loving relationships.

Aged 47, I can afford rebellion. After four years' therapeutic work when I transferred emotional dependence from husband and mother (violently resisted) to my therapist, and with a more recent sense of growing independence, I reflect on the struggle, persistent defiance, to separate from a mother who experiences my difference as threatening enough to punish. The more I draw on my therapist's interest and encouragement to discover what I feel about what, the more I realise what I missed - acceptance and appreciation.

There's work left to do, with that rage, starting with shaking on a no-hitting deal - since smacking begets smacking - just as we shook hands on a no-sex deal four years ago. We've built a good foundation for having the tantrums I anticipate being the healthy non-harming way of letting off steam. Experiencing rage without fear of punishment will be as liberating as experiencing love without having to fuck.

Isn't it criminal not to legislate against the only type of hitting still permissible - anything else by anybody other than parents is called assault, bodily harm etc - to protect kids from being live punch-bags? 