

JEWISH SOURCES ON ATTITUDES TO CHILDREN AND CHILDREN AT RISK

Prepared by Rina Cohen & Translated by Sarah Manning for the Herczeg Seminar, May 2017

“For I have singled him [Abraham] out, that he may instruct his children and his heirs to keep the way of the Lord by doing what is just and right, in order that the Lord will do for Abraham as he promised him” (Genesis 18:19).

“Impress [the commandments] upon your children, recite them when you stay at home and when you are away, when you lie down and when you get up” (Deuteronomy 6:7).

Education and the transmission of our traditions and culture can be done anywhere, at any time, and in every situation.

“Train a child in the way he ought to go; he will not swerve from it even in old age” (Proverbs 22:6).

The Malbim (Rav Meir Leibush 1809-1879) explains: “The idea is to educate each person according to his personality, because each person is naturally suited to different ideas, and perhaps his uniqueness may only emerge later...”

The Jewish approach teaches us to treat a child in accordance with his/her nature. We should see each child as a unique and independent person, who should be respected and loved according to his/her specific nature and character. In this way we will prevent our children from developing into children at risk.

Is Physical Punishment Permitted in our Sources?

In Proverbs we have the well-known adages: “Do not withhold discipline from a child; if you beat him with a rod he will not die. Beat him with a rod and you will save him from the grave” (23: 13-14); and, “He who spares the rod hates his son, but he who loves him disciplines him early” (13: 24).

On the other hand, there are many sources that emphasize that the physical punishment of children is forbidden.

Rabbi Abraham Isaac Kook (1865-1935) wrote in *Ein Aya* (p. 31): “Rabbi Yehuda and Rav discussed the meaning of the line in Chronicles 1, 16:22, where it says, ‘*Do not touch My anointed ones; do not harm My prophets*’? The anointed ones are the school children and the prophets are the teachers. Any contact that involves violence is forbidden – physical or sexual or verbal – as a way of treating children. It is preferable to rebuke them with suitable words rather than with physical punishment.”

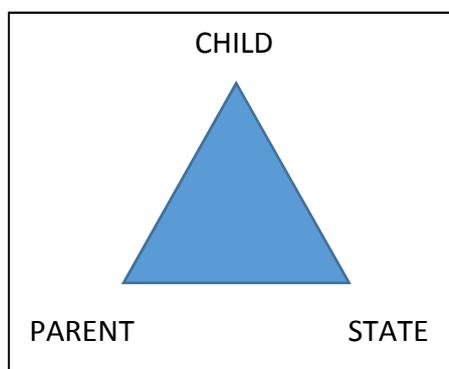
Rabbi Shimshon Refael Hirsch (1808-1888) wrote in “On Education”: “We should be the last people to recommend physical punishment, and this applies particularly to parents.”

Israeli Sephardi Chief Rabbi Rav Shlomo Moshe Amar wrote:

“We should keep well away from problematic methods of education, from using violence towards or insulting children. We should teach that they are people, made in the image of G-d, and we should respect and love them truly and honestly.”

Israeli Law on Children

According to the Israeli law, the good of the child is the central consideration, and the parents are responsible to provide the child with all their physical and other needs. In situations where it is necessary in order to prevent harm to the child, they should be removed from their parents' home. The relationship between child, parent(s) and state can be described as a triangle:



This is a framework of gentle relationships that requires a balance between different interests. The rational parent should provide their child with security, love, nutrition, shelter, and an role model , concern and warmth, feelings of stability, a model for controlling their impulses, and giving the child the ability to establish their autonomous identity.

There are two categories of children in danger:

1. Children in danger - on a physical, emotional or sexual level. Children in conditions that involve risk, whether relationships between a child and a parent, between a child and their family, or between a child and the community
2. Children with special needs that require specific services.