

NO SPANKING ZONE

by Fred Hobbs

Considering all ethnic groups around the world, no standard exists that proscribes a certain style or procedure of parenting that is universal.

In some cultures, parents are required to arrange the marriages of their children, enforce rights and privileges unequally between the male and female children, and otherwise exercise strong control over their entire lives. Harsh punishments, including such barbaric acts as stoning to death for adultery a girl who actually had been raped still are carried out by ethnic tradition.

In the Western World, ethnicity is much less of a factor in parenting than it was a couple of generations ago. Mores have changed, fueled by vast advances in the areas of social communication and human rights. Social interaction among kids from various ethnic groups is not only more common today, but often accepted as part of the norm of American life. Inter-marriages are celebrated every day somewhere in the country, though some parents may not be happy at the prospect of their child marrying “out of the faith” or to someone from another ancestral background.

Prominent in considering these changes is the whole question of disciplining children. The current controversy over professional football players abusing their wives or girlfriends has now expanded to cases of alleged child abuse.

Minnesota Vikings star running back Adrian Peterson is accused of taking a wooden switch and “spanking” his four-year-old son.

No one is saying that this act results from Peterson’s ethnic background (he is African-American), but strangely some of his supporters defend the practice by claiming that Peterson, a Texas native, was merely following a disciplinary approach widely used in the South.

Regardless of how this issue is resolved in the National Football League, or the question of how parenting according to ethnic background is viewed, when it comes to corporal punishment of children, one may ask: “Where is Dr. Spock when we need him? Unfortunately, the good doctor passed away in 1998 at the age of 95.

Based on his research and practice in pediatrics, Spock did leave us with some wise observations on parenting, specifically on discipline. Beatings, “switchings” and so-called spankings, play a strong role in the child’s acceptance of violence. Often the child who was abused grows up to be an abuser. Dr. Spock found that physical punishments were not very effective in changing behavior, often encouraging kids to be bullies. With several years to test the doctor’s research, evidence is strong that he was spot on.

As the effects of ethnic backgrounds continue to be blurred, perhaps so will the parenting

practices based on them become less of a factor in rearing a child.

Rich traditions can still be preserved while using modern methods of parenting.

And, by following Dr. Spock's advice of many years ago, those troubled and troubling professional athletes can become as comfortable in a "no spanking zone" as they are in the "red zone" about to make a sure touchdown.