

Box 11.1 *Ten Myths That Perpetuate Corporal Punishment*

In his book *Beating the Devil Out of Them: Corporal Punishment in American Families*, Murray Straus (1994) offers the most comprehensive statement to date on the problem of spanking as a discipline technique. Straus's arguments in one of the chapters in his book *Ten Myths That Perpetuate Corporal Punishment* are summarized below:

Myth 1: Spanking works better. According to Straus, there is no evidence that spanking works better than other forms of discipline. What little evidence has been collected suggests that spanking may be less effective than nonviolent forms of discipline (e.g., time-outs or loss of privileges).

Myth 2: Spanking is needed as a last resort. If one accepts the argument that spanking is no better than other forms of discipline, then it stands to reason that there are no situations in which spanking is necessary. Straus argues that much of the time when parents resort to hitting, they are doing so out of their own frustration. Essentially, the parent who hits is sending a message to the child that if one is angry, hitting is justified.

Myth 3: Spanking is harmless. According to Straus, hitting is so firmly entrenched in American culture that it is difficult for us to admit that it is wrong. To do so would be to admit that our parents were wrong or we have been wrong. The evidence suggests, however, that on average, spanking does more harm than good. Certainly, most people who were spanked "turn out fine," but this does not disprove the general pattern. That most smokers do not die of lung cancer does not disprove the evidence on the harmful effects of smoking.

Myth 4: Spanking one or two times won't cause any damage. It is true that the evidence suggests that spanking is most harmful when it is frequent and severe. If spanking is harmful in large quantities, however, how can it be good in small quantities?

Myth 5: Parents can't stop without training. Eliminating spanking would be easy, Straus maintains, if society would embrace the belief that a child should never be hit. Parent educators and social scientists are reluctant to take this stand, however, because of the belief that parents cannot be expected to stop spanking unless they are presented with alternative parenting techniques. Straus counters that parents do not need training in alternative parenting techniques—they simply need to embrace the belief that spanking is wrong. Everyone agrees, for example, that directing demeaning and insulting language toward children (i.e., psychological abuse) is wrong, and no one argues that