

# THE SUN

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## Working to end spanking

*Mahoney Family Fund seeks to stop corporal punishment for all children*

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The [Mahoney Family Fund](#) is trying to end a practice that can be harmful to children: spanking.

The Tewksbury-based organization held a webinar earlier this month to teach the community about the negative effects of corporal punishment and is working to encourage local businesses and organizations to do the same.



“There are literally no positive effects of corporal punishment. Zero,” said Maureen Mahoney, founder of the organization, which works to end violence and child abuse. “Parents say it stops the bad behavior, but it stops it in the moment without the child learning why, especially for younger children.”

In the webinar, child abuse experts Catherine Taylor and Stacie LeBlanc spoke about their research and work to end the practice of corporal punishment. Taylor explained that corporal punishment has been banned in 63 countries around the world, but the United States is not one of them; in fact, it is legal in schools in almost 20 states.

The negative effects of the practice are many, according to research presented in the webinar. Children who have been exposed to corporal punishment have higher rates of stress and anxiety, lower self-esteem and self-confidence and even slower brain development. When they get older, they are more likely to abuse drugs and alcohol, have mental health issues resulting in suicide and exhibit aggressive behaviors.

“It’s impossible for the brain to be open and take in new information and retain it when No. 1, they’ve just had trauma, and No. 2, they’re going to be on the defensive,” Mahoney said.

One solution presented by LeBlanc was the implementation of “[no-hit zones](#)” in public areas like hospitals and offices. She explained that like no-smoking signs, signs that tell visitors they may not hit their children while in that space help to change attitudes about the practice without attacking the parent, and may lead to parents being less likely to hit their children in private at home. While some parents may argue that it’s not illegal to hit their children as a form of discipline, they can be told that it’s not illegal to smoke, either — they just can’t do it there.

Mahoney said her organization is working on spreading the use of no-hit zones locally, and has had interest from organizations like Lowell Community Health Center and Lowell General Hospital. They are planning to work with local legislators as well to promote the program and to reach out to local businesses to establish no-hit zones.

“There are things that people can do to sort of break this knee-jerk reaction to hit,” she said. “A lot of times, it’s what was done to them, but it doesn’t mean that those habits can’t be changed.”

For information, visit [mahoneyfamilyfund.com](http://mahoneyfamilyfund.com).