

*Words from 12th Annual IN SUPPORT OF
CHILDREN Vigil*

*Honoring Children Who Lost their
Lives at the Hands of those Who
Should Love Them*



In Support of Children



THIS IS OUR FIRST VIGIL WITHOUT OUR FOUNDER AND LEADER DR. KAREN A. POLONKO. KAREN PASSED IN AUGUST OF 2016. HER INSPIRATION AND ENERGY WILL BE WITH US FOREVER!

JENNIFER KENNARD

PRESIDENT, IN SUPPORT OF CHILDREN



Welcome everyone to In Support of Children's 12th Annual Candle Light Vigil.

My name is Jennifer Kennard and I am the current president of In Support of Children. In Support of Children is a student organization founded at ODU that volunteers at Park Place Child Life Center in Norfolk, brings in speakers to talk about the negative effects of corporal punishment, and honors the lives of children that have died at the hands of their caregivers every year at this event. Our main goal is to educate

the public on how detrimental corporal punishment is and we aim to end all forms of violence against children.

The Vigil is my favorite event that this organization is apart of due to the fact that the reasons we are here are so important.

We're here to honor the lives of children that have died by the hands of those that were supposed to love and nurture them.

We want to keep the memory of these children alive so they did not die in vain. We remember their horrific stories to remember that we should do everything we can to stop abuse from happening.

While we come together with heavy hearts and sadness, we also come together to celebrate the lives of these children and our courage to advocate for them.

We speak out for them and tell their stories because they cannot.

NICK ADAMS, FACULTY ADVISOR TO IN SUPPORT OF CHILDREN

A HUMAN RIGHT AND ITS VIOLATION



Over 26 years ago the world embarked on a journey, a commitment to children across the world. With the adoption of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, we made a promise to protect our children and promote their human rights so that they can grow and thrive and reach their full potential. Among those is the right to live free of violence of any form.

Article 19 of the UN CRC states that

States Parties shall take all appropriate legislative, administrative, social and educational measures to protect the child from all forms of physical or mental violence, injury or abuse, neglect or negligent treatment, maltreatment or exploitation, including

sexual abuse, while in the care of parent(s), legal guardian(s) or any other person who has the care of the child.

To date, 51 countries around the world have abolished legal support for corporal punishment of children in all contexts, schools, and family, child-care, juvenile justice.

Until 2015, Somalia and the U.S. were the only countries in the UN that had yet to ratify the CRC. As of now, the U.S. is the only country that has not ratified the CRC.

As a country we claim to be the land of the free, however, children are one population that are far from that when it comes to their right to the sanctity of their body and their being. In his country, and around the world, children are seen as the property of their parents. This places them in very vulnerable situations, including experiencing violence at the hands of those who are supposed to love and protect them. It seems that the main worry when it comes to corporal punishment is the right of the parent to discipline how they see fit, regardless of the negative outcomes associated with CP and the way it strips children of their human dignity. We must put an end to this violence against children, and begin to treat them like the human beings they are.

I would like to talk briefly about the child abuse both locally and nationally to give us an idea of the scope of this issue.

Statistics on CP and abuse

- 70% of adults in the US agree, “It is sometimes necessary to discipline a child with a good hard spanking. (GSS 2014)
- 55% - Moderate physical discipline - Slapped face; spanked with hand on buttocks; hit head with knuckles; pulled hair; pinched; twisted ear; forced to kneel or stand in one position; hit buttocks with an object such as stick, broom, or belt; hit elsewhere other than buttocks with an object; put hot pepper or spicy food in child’s mouth; shook child aged 2–18 yrs.

Hampton Roads

- 13 child fatalities in 2015 that were founded as a result of abuse or neglect
- 85% were age 3 or younger
- Approximately 40% died from physical abuse
- Other 60% found to have died from neglect

Virginia

- Almost 50,000 children were reported as possible victims of abuse and neglect in 2015
- Of those, approximately 6,500 were founded reports
- 32% of those children were under age 4
- 75% were under age 12
- A child is abused or neglected every 75 minutes
- Every 14 days a child dies from abuse or neglect

Nationally

- Approximately 1,600 children die in from abuse and neglect
- Over 3 million children are investigated by the CPS annually
- There are over 600,000 substantiated cases of child abuse and neglect each year

Effects of Corporal Punishment and Child Physical Abuse

- Immediate compliance – is this worth the risk of all of the negative outcomes associated with CP?
- Increased risk for physical abuse _ most CPA starts out as an attempt to control the child with CP
- Poorer mental health including increased risk for depression and suicidal thoughts
- Less empathy
- Increased delinquent and anti-social behavior
- Poorer quality of parent-child relationship
- More likely to
 - Assault a sibling or another child
 - Commit and be arrested for violent and non-violent crime as teens
 - Assault spouse
 - Assault their own children
 - Start sexual intercourse at a younger age
 - Become pregnant as a teenager
- Less likely to use contraceptives and condoms

End on a good note! No hit zone Last month a No Hit Zone was launched in General Academic Pediatrics, Dr. John Harrington's practice inside Children's Hospital of The King's Daughters in Norfolk.

DR. RUTH TRIPLETT:

LET'S COMMIT TO A NEW LEVEL OF ACTIVISM

Thank you to all the students of IN SUPPORT OF CHILDREN that spent so much time and effort putting this together. Thank you too to Lou Lombardo for being so vital in carrying this event on for decades. Also at this year's Vigil this year's Vigil we remember Dr. Karen Polonko, who passed away this past August. Karen's vision and energy started IN SUPPORT OF CHILDREN and its work to change the way our culture views children. Her caring and empathy fostered our activism on behalf of children for the past 25 years.



A little historical note from Dr. Lombardo note about Nixzmary Brown and the start of the Vigil:

The Vigil began when Karen learned from her sister Jacqui about Nixzmary's death and the horrible things that happened to her. Karen's sister lives in Brooklyn where Nixzmary was killed. I remember Karen talking to her students about it. I saw her in the hall and she was crying, She told me about it and that how we needed to do something so Nixzmary's death would not go unnoticed and be just another statistic. It was important to recognize this death, its circumstances and to share our grief and concern with others, to bring some collective energy Nixzmary's spirit and renew our sense of purpose. It was then that the idea for the 'candlelight Vigil' was born.

This seems to be a unique time in our history. A time ripe for change. A time calling for activism and that is the theme of my talk – let's take this moment in history and make it a turning point for children in our country.

But what is it I am asking you to be activist about?

Lets say a new product comes out, a kid's product. And the majority of American parents like it and use it on their kids.

But later studies come out that show that these kids are much more likely to suffer from

- Depression for some reason. More studies come out showing
- Academic problems: including lower IQs and lower test grades

- Behavioral problems arise: including antisocial disorder, aggressiveness towards others, bullying, lying, and later in life even domestic abuse
- Still more studies come out that link the use of this product to drug abuse and addiction
- and another study shows that 99% of parents of current prison inmates used this product on them.

Knowing this information many questions arise.

Would you still use the product on your own children? Or would you err on the side of caution for the sake of your child? Would you simply use a different product that did not have these side effects? Would you try to keep other unknowing persons from using it? Would you say something to them in the grocery line if you saw someone buying this product? Would you educate them even though it may be upsetting to them? Would you expect the government to step in? You're probably thinking they would step in and stop production. Especially when it is revealed that it offers no additional benefits than what similar products have to offer. But to your amazement the US doesn't stop it because so many parents believe they have the right to use it. The reasoning often being that "my parents used this product on me and I'm just fine" even though there are thousands of cases saying otherwise.

What am I really talking about?

Many of you at this point have figured out that I am not really talking about a product you can buy in the store, but instead I am talking *about a method of inflicting pain on children to control children's behavior, a method to get children to stop what they are doing*: Corporal Punishment or (Spanking).

I use this example to help defuse the topic and allow us to think of it with more of an open mind. But that doesn't change the fact (and there are such things as facts) that all of the short and long term problems discussed (depression, drug abuse, academic issues, etc.) are real and a result of corporal punishment.

The effects of hitting a child go beyond depression and bad grades or incarceration. It takes a physical toll on children. In fact 142,000 children are seriously injured from corporal punishment every year in this country.

That is 1 child every 4 minutes.

Of these children 18,000 will be permanently disabled. That is one child losing the loss of some bodily or cognitive function every 12 hours.

In 2010, parents were responsible for almost 80 percent of child deaths caused by abuse. .2

When spanking arises in conversation there is often much talk of discipline and the need for it in our society. Unfortunately discipline too often means hurting or hitting a child and make no doubt that this often leads to grave circumstances. In fact in the U.S. the defense of discipline was raised in 41% of homicide prosecutions when parents “accidentally” killed their children.

For all that is out there that may cause harm I couldn't help but think the one place a child should feel safe is in his or her own home and yet when it comes to abuse and neglect it is one of the most dangerous places to be for many of our children. Even more sad is the fact that it is the one place our government supports the use of sanctioned violence in the form of spanking. Hopefully, knowing the statistics, you feel the desire to not only make your home, but all homes safer for our children.

But can we make a difference?

Not too long ago every state in the US permitted teachers and principals to corporally punish students for the sake of discipline. Americans today are strongly opposed to this and today less than a 20 states still permit it in schools. That is progress. Can we affect change out of the schools and save children from unneeded harm or even death in their own homes? I believe the people in this room can make that difference.

We already know the data is on our side. Doctors are also on our side: We know that the American Academy of Pediatrics has asked for legislation that it no longer be permitted that children under 2 be allowed to be spanked since their cognitive abilities do not permit them to understand right from wrong and are at great risk for permanent injuries. Thus the group they feel should be most protected is the one we are failing every day.

How can we make a difference....

Be politically active

If you would expect the government to do something about the product then why not expect the same concerning corporal punishment? Create a petition or sign one. Stand up and make your voice heard. For some reason I have found that those that are pro-spanking tend to be much more vocal about it than those that are anti-spanking. But it is through expressing your opinion and the education of others that this behavior will be reduced and/or stopped. In fact studies show that parents with college degrees are significantly less likely to spank their children than others. There is a reason for this. Get on Facebook or another social medium and express how you feel. Share the facts, educate.

Say something when you see something

If we revisit our hypothetical concerning a child's product.... instead of asking yourself if you would use it on your children, ask yourself if you would use spanking on your children. Even if

a skeptic... would you not err on the side of caution? If your answer is not the same for both you should ask yourself, why?

Instead of asking yourself if you would say something to your neighbor in the grocery store about the product, ask yourself if the next time you hear a parent threaten their child with “beating them” if they don’t stop crying, if you would say or do something. If not, ask yourself why? For fear of reprisal from the parent? What is more important than the well-being and life of a child or a parent’s opinion of you?

It is interesting that if the grocery store hypothetical was changed to a babysitter or teacher making those same threats we would feel more compelled to stand up and say something. But who is doing the hitting doesn’t change who is being hit. And we already know the reality is that parents and boyfriends of mothers are the ones we most need to protect the children from.

Don’t Hesitate, Report and Educate:

When the rhetoric of discipline is raised tell them and others that not a single study shows ANY benefit from spanking that cannot be achieved from other non-violent forms of discipline. Time outs, taking away toys, or better yet rewarding good behavior works if done properly and has more positive long term impact.

Don’t hesitate to report and educate

If you suspect abuse or neglect, even in the slightest you must speak up for those children that cannot do so themselves. Don’t be afraid to call the authorities and err on the side of caution. But lets make a difference. Let’s promise to err on the side of caution, for the sake of children like whose memories we are honoring today....let’s all err on the side of caution and protect our children the best that we can.

So please leave today with this simple idea: It starts with you. Will you do what is in the best interest of your children, of your neighbors, of our society? Will you vow to not hit, will you vow to try to make a difference? Will you make sure to not hesitate to report and educate.

Thank you.