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A Darn Good Hiding or the Naughty Step?  
Ideas on child discipline in New Zealand,  
1890-2008.

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## Table of Contents

	Page
Acknowledgements	2
Abstract	4
Introduction: "Back in My Day"	5
Chapter 1. Approaches to the Topic of Child Discipline.	16
Chapter 2. "Gentleness if Possible, Strictness if Necessary": Child rearing advice in the 1890s-1920s.	23
Chapter 3. "All Fathers Have to Beat their Boys at Times": Discipline and punishment in everyday life, 1890s-1920s.	36
Chapter 4. No Such Thing as a Naughty Child: The rise of permissive parenting in the 1930s-50s.	51
Chapter 5. "Too Much Mother and Not Enough Father": Reactions against permissive parenting in the 1930s-50s.	65
Chapter 6. "A Degree of Failure": Smacking and the promotion of alternative discipline methods, 1960s-70s.	79
Chapter 7. "Punishment, Threat of Punishment and Occasional Praise": Discipline and punishment in the 1960s-70s.	91
Chapter 8. Raising Children Whose Company We Enjoy: Parenting Advice in the 1980s-2000s.	103
Chapter 9. Supporting the Right to Smack?: Discipline of children in the 1980s-2000s.	117
Conclusion: "Kids These Days"	128
Bibliography.	136

## Abstract:

This thesis examines the history of child discipline in New Zealand since 1890, taking into account both trends in child-rearing advice and the common practices of ordinary parents. It explores the common stereotype that children “these days” are ill-disciplined in comparison with their earlier counterparts, and argues that while physical punishment is used less often than in the past, and usually in a milder form, it is still used more frequently and harshly than would be expected from the results of recent opinion polls.

Child discipline has always been about setting a child up to live a happy life. As ideas on how to achieve this goal have changed, so too have the acceptable forms of punishment. During the 1890s-1920s, the difference between good discipline and abuse was simply a matter of frequency, and this idea was shared by both parenting advisors and the general public. Since the 1930s, however, parenting experts were frequently out of step with the parents they were trying to teach, and that their influence on parenting practice was at best delayed, and at worst entirely contradictory to that which they intended. Letters, magazine and newspaper articles and contemporary studies on attitudes to discipline are used to show that parenting practice was often very different to that promoted by parenting advisors. Finally, this thesis concludes that a contextualist approach best suits the history of child-rearing advice in New Zealand, while an evolutionist approach is more appropriate in terms of common practice.