



Beating video sparks talks on discipline of children

By [Sharon Jayson](#), USA TODAY

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A video of a Texas judge punishing his daughter has led to investigations of the belt-wielding father and also launched a national conversation about discipline and spanking.

The graphic video of Aransas County Court-at-Law Judge William Adams hitting his then-16-year-old daughter for seven minutes as discipline for her use of an illegal computer file-sharing program has been viewed on YouTube more than 2.4 million times. Hillary Adams, now 23, posted the 2004 video.

Her father issued a statement saying she posted it after he threatened to end her financial support.

Local police and a state judicial panel are investigating, the Associated Press reported.

"This sort of voyeurism is an interesting situation, because the tape was surreptitiously made by the daughter," psychologist George Holden says. "People may find it fascinating too because spanking is part of our culture, but this is clearly an incident where it's gone way, way wrong."

Holden, of [Southern Methodist University](#), says he is launching a new organization, the U.S. Alliance to End Hitting of Children.

"What that father did is pretty horrific and it's clearly not discipline," says Elizabeth Gershoff, an associate professor of human development and family sciences at the [University of Texas-Austin](#). "If that judge had done that to any other person ... he would have gone to jail."

She says the father wasn't teaching a lesson but releasing anger.

Assault laws vary by state and provide exemptions to parents administering corporal punishment.

"Many people would be surprised at how many teenagers are spanked and whipped. It's more frequent for younger children, but it's not by any means rare for teenagers," says [David Finkelhor](#), director of the Crimes Against Children Research Center at the [University of New Hampshire](#).

Sociologist Murray Straus, also at the [New Hampshire](#) campus, has been studying spanking since 1970 and says the outrage over the video may push more people in the "no-hitting direction."

Robert Larzelere, a professor of human development and family science at Oklahoma State University in Stillwater, supports what he terms "conditional spanking" — two swats with an open hand for children 2-6.

He has not seen the video but says the punishment "was clearly inappropriate on several counts: the age of the child, hitting with a belt, how long it lasted and what she was being punished for."

Finkelhor says digital media can protect kids: "I think thousands if not millions of parents are going to be put on notice that their brutal treatment of their kids could end them up in the public eye."