

ISPCC

ALWAYS HERE FOR CHILDREN



**Slapping Children
is Wrong,
Pass it On.**

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Think before you SMACK... and then don't!

Are you going to smack because of something your child has done or because you are at the end of your tether?

If it is because of stress, will taking it out on your child really make you feel better?

If it is because of something your child has done, how will a smack make things better?

What is Physical Punishment?

Physical punishment is any punishment in which physical force is intended to cause pain or discomfort: hitting children with a hand, or with a cane, strap or other object, kicking, shaking or throwing children, scratching, pinching or pulling hair, locking or tying them up.

English and some other languages have special words like "Smacking" and "Spanking" which tend to suggest that physical punishment of children is different from other forms of violence. Phrases like "a good smack", "six of the best" reflect societies unique approval of it.

It is time to end Physical Punishment of children worldwide because:

- Hitting children is a violation of their fundamental rights as people and a constant confirmation of their low status.
- It is a dangerous practice, sometimes causing serious "accidental" injuries or escalating into behaviour recognised as child abuse.
- It encourages violent attitudes and behaviour both in childhood and later life - violence breeds violence.
- It doesn't teach the world's children anything positive.



Children's Status as People

Adoption of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child in 1989 focused the world's attention on the condition of its children. Thousands of children die each week, while many more struggle for existence in the half-life of malnutrition and chronic sickness, often caught up in wars and environmental hazards that adults – not children - create.

The key to improving action worldwide is a higher political priority for children based on a dramatic improvement in their status as people. A measure of the status we accord to people, including children, is the degree to which we respect their civil rights including, most fundamentally, their right to physical integrity, to protection from all forms of inter-personal violence.

This is why the United Nations Convention upholds children's rights to be protected from "*all forms of physical or mental violence*" and why outlawing the physical punishment of children is a worthy aim even where their very survival is at stake.

Hitting children with hands, canes, belts and other objects confirms their low status as lesser people than adults and passes from one generation to another the dangerous message that it is acceptable to use violence to solve inter-personal conflicts. Research suggests that if we are to reduce the overall levels of violence in adult societies, we must recognise physical punishment of children by adults as a root cause, challenge it and end it by education and legal reform.

Ending the physical punishment of children cannot solve all the major ills that face them, but it is a necessary and urgent part of the overall task.

A Controversial Issue

Challenging parents' rights to hit children often provokes emotional reactions. This is not surprising. Where physical punishment is common it is a habit passed down from one generation to another, part of the child-rearing culture and often of religious belief. People's own experiences as children, and as parents, get in the way of compassionate and logical consideration of the arguments. The UN



convention and other human rights charters with worldwide application make it clear that the world considers the right to physical integrity to be an absolute right, one which neither culture nor religion, tradition nor material circumstances, should limit.

Those who campaign to end physical punishment of children are not just promoting one way of child-rearing over another; they are seeking to apply a fundamental human right to all adult/child relationships.

What's wrong with smacking?

It's wrong for adults to hit adults and wrong for children to hit children or adults. So it must be wrong for adults to hit children.

Children learn right from wrong by copying parents. If you hit them they will think it is okay to hit people smaller than themselves. If you don't want them to think it's ever right to hit, don't ever hit them. Even if they've hit or hurt somebody, two wrongs don't make a right.

Smacking does not help children learn how to behave

A smack shows you are angry but not what you are angry about.

Smacked children will not hear if you try to explain – how can they listen while they cry?

Even if they do hear they will not feel like trying to please you: smacks hurt and humiliate children so they are more likely to make them angry than sorry.

Good discipline means working with your children, not against them...

Remember you're the grown up. Your children are your apprentices in learning how to behave: show and tell them how it's done.

- Keep them safe while they grow: give them secure limits they can test but not overturn.



- Make sure the baby can't reach the fire; the toddler cannot open that forbidden gate; the older child is holding your hand before you reach the road.
- Keep them secure while they learn: give them their say, listen to them, respect their point of view, but don't let them bore or blackmail you into giving in against your better judgement.
- Children need your attention and will do anything to get it. The more you give when they are being a pleasure, the less they try to force from you by being a pain. *Do you always answer when they speak or only when they whine?*

Try to be positive

'Do' works better than 'don't': rewards work better than punishments

- Show and tell what they **should** do - not just what they shouldn't
 - **Explain** your reasons - "because I say so" teaches nothing for next time.
 - Try to say "**yes**" and "well done" at least as often as "no" and "stop that".
 - Be ready to praise for behaviour you like as to **scold** for behaviour you don't.
 - Rely on **rewards** like hugs and jokes, not **punishments** like smacks and yells.
 - **Ignore** minor silliness and "cheek" - the more you nag the less they'll listen.
 - When they do something wrong explain what it is and **how to put things right**
- Even when you **dislike your child's** behaviour, **never suggest that you dislike your child.**

"States 'parties shall take all appropriate, legislative, administrative, social and educational measures to protect the child from all forms of physical and mental violence, injury or abuse... while in the care of parent(s), legal guardians(s), or any other person who has the care of the child". UN convention on the Rights of the Child. Article 19 (ratified by the Irish Government Sept 1992)

"We don't yet know, above all, what the world might be like if children were to grow up without being subjected to humiliation, if parents would respect them and take them seriously as people." Alice Miller, For your own good, Virago, 1987.

"By consciously deciding not to inflict pain, not to cause suffering, not to coerce, and not to assault a child in the name of discipline, we will be making choices that will enhance and



sustain life, not deny it. Love and nature, empathy and understanding - not fear, not hate, not anger and not revenge – must be our goal. If we are determined to protect and not to destroy life on this unique and precious planet we call Earth, these are the choices we can make.” Philip Greven, Spare the child, Knoop, 1991.

For Advice and Support

For Parents in need of support:

ISPCC Support Line (Monday to Friday 9am-5pm)

01 676 7960

www.ispcc.ie

For young people in need of support:

Childline - 24 hours a day

1800 66 66 66

www.childline.ie

