

STOP Hitting!

Banning all corporal punishment of children

Questions and answers
for older children and young people



Global Initiative to
End All Corporal Punishment
of Children



Save the Children



People often have a lot of questions about banning corporal punishment of children. This booklet is aimed at older children and young people by simplifying answers to those questions. There is also a version aimed at adults, which you can get from the **Global Initiative to End All Corporal Punishment** (www.endcorporalpunishment.org). In the future, we hope to make a version aimed at younger children as well. If you have any ideas about this, you can email us at info@endcorporalpunishment.org.

In this booklet, there may be words that are hard to understand. Here are what some of these words mean...

Assault	the crime of hurting someone on purpose.
Ban	to say that something is not allowed. When hitting children is 'banned' in a country, nobody in that country is allowed to hit children.
Campaigning	trying to change something that you believe is wrong.
Equal protection	when we say 'equal protection,' we mean that children should be protected from all kinds of violence as much as adults are. For example, if it is illegal to hit an adult, then it should be illegal to hit a child too.
Human rights	basic rights that people around the world agree that everyone has.
Illegal or unlawful	against the law.
Law	a set of rules that tells people in a country how to behave.
Legal or lawful	saying that something is 'legal' or 'lawful' in a country means that the law in that country says it is OK.
Physical integrity	owning and having control over your own body. Everyone has a right to physical integrity and to feel that their body is safe from all forms of violence.
Positive discipline	non-violent ways of caring for children and teaching them how to behave.
Prohibition	the same as banning something.
Protection	keeping something or someone safe. 'Protecting' a child from violence means keeping them safe from violence.
Violate	break. If someone's human rights are 'violated,' it means their human rights have not been respected.
Violence	hurting someone on purpose.

Here are some questions that people often ask about banning corporal punishment...

What is corporal punishment?

'Corporal' means 'physical' – to do with your body. Here, it means 'using physical force to hurt someone or make them uncomfortable'.

'Punishment' means that the force is used to discipline someone – for example, to show them that they have done something wrong, to make them feel sorry, or to teach them how to behave better.

So **corporal punishment** means punishing someone using physical force in a way which is meant to hurt them or make them uncomfortable. Any punishment using force is corporal punishment, however light it is.

For example, if a toddler spills her drink and her parent hits her on the hand to punish her, that is corporal punishment. Corporal punishment often takes the form of hitting ('smacking' or 'spanking') children.

But it can also take other forms (for example, kicking children, shaking them or forcing them to stay in uncomfortable positions). If a child at school doesn't know the answer to a question and so his teacher forces him to stand on one leg for a long time, that is corporal punishment too.

There are also other forms of punishment which are not physical, but which are just as cruel – for example, making children feel scared or embarrassed on purpose. This kind of punishment is very disrespectful to children and is just as wrong as physical punishment.

Corporal punishment of children can happen in various places – including at home, at school, in other places where children are cared for and in prison.

All kinds of cruel punishment, including all corporal punishment, are wrong and should be banned.

Does corporal punishment really hurt?

Yes, of course it does! Adults often don't realise that corporal punishment hurts both 'on the outside' and 'on the inside'.

Corporal punishment hurts physically and emotionally, and it can be very humiliating, too. Research on children's feelings and thoughts about corporal punishment is now being done all over the world. In this research, children are telling adults that it does hurt, a lot.¹

The biggest piece of research is the UN Secretary-General's Study on Violence against Children.² In 2006, Professor Paulo Sérgio Pinheiro, who led the study, wrote:

'Throughout the study process, children have consistently expressed the urgent need to stop all this violence. Children testify to the hurt – not only physical, but 'the hurt inside' – which this violence causes them, compounded by adult acceptance, even approval, of it. Governments need to accept that this is indeed an emergency, although it is not a new emergency. Children have suffered violence at the hands of adults unseen and unheard for centuries. But now that the scale and impact of violence against children is becoming visible, they cannot be kept waiting any longer for the effective protection to which they have an unqualified right.'

Other pieces of research³ about corporal punishment tell us more about how it can damage individual people and society. For example, a big study published in 2002 showed that children who were physically punished by their parents were more likely to have various problems – including being aggressive and unfriendly, difficulty learning about right and wrong, and mental health problems.

A different piece of research found that two parents out of five who had hit their children had used a different degree of force than they meant to. This means that they might have hit their children much harder than they meant to. Obviously, this could be very dangerous – children, especially babies and small children, could get seriously hurt.

All this research is important. But even if there was no research, corporal punishment would still be wrong. Children have the right to protection from all forms of violence, just as all other people do. Even if hitting someone doesn't cause them serious long-term damage, it is still wrong to hit them. This is just as true for children as it is for adults.

Most people don't want corporal punishment to be illegal. Shouldn't we listen to them?

No. Children have the right to be protected from violence, even if not everybody agrees.

Governments have to make sure that children's rights are respected. Politicians should do what is right and take a stand on this issue, even if most people don't agree.

In almost all the countries that have banned all corporal punishment, most adults did not agree at first – but once the law was made, many more people changed their minds and began to think that corporal punishment was wrong. In a few years' time, adults will look back and be amazed – and ashamed – that once some people thought it was OK to hit children.

Also, the results of surveys about people's opinions on corporal punishment are not always reliable, because the answers people give can change, depending on how much they know about the subject and how the questions are worded.

Being hit as a child didn't do me any harm. Would I be where I am today if my parents hadn't disciplined me physically?

None of us know how we would have turned out if our parents had never hit or humiliated us.

People who hit children usually do it because they were hit themselves when they were children. There is no point in blaming people in the past for hitting children, because they were just doing what was considered normal then. But times change, and now we know that hitting children is wrong and can be very damaging. Today we realise that children have rights just like everyone else – and it is time to make sure that all their rights are respected, including the right to protection from violence.

Some people say: 'I was hit as a child and I turned out OK.' But there are people who have had all kinds of bad experiences while growing up who have 'turned out OK' as adults – and nobody would say that what they experienced was good. Often it is the way they have dealt with their experiences and turned their lives around that has helped them to be 'OK', not the experiences themselves.

Parents have a right to choose how they bring up their children. Should we interfere even when children are not being abused?

Parents don't own their children – children are people with their own rights.

These rights must be respected everywhere, including at home. Everyone in a family has an equal right to protection from violence, however young or old they are. Just as adults in a family should not hit each other, adults should not hit children – and the law should say so.

The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child⁴ says that families are very important. It says that parents have a responsibility to look after children and make sure that they act in their best interests.

Some people say that hitting children to punish them is good for them. But the Committee on the Rights of the Child⁵ has said that corporal punishment is never good for children. It is in children's best interests to protect them fully from all forms of violence, including corporal punishment.

Why not tell parents how to hit their children safely, instead of banning all hitting?

There is no such thing as 'safe' hitting. All hitting shows disrespect for children and invades their physical integrity.

Lots of research has shown that often, 'mild' corporal punishment can lead on to much more serious violence against children. Also, adults may sometimes not be able to judge accurately how hard they hit children. See 'Does corporal punishment really hurt?'

A few countries have tried to make laws defining acceptable ways of hitting children, for example by saying that only children of a certain age can be hit, or that children can only be hit in certain ways. This is a bad thing to do. People would never say that some kinds of violence against women, or against elderly people, are OK. Of course, all violence against these groups of people, and other groups, should be illegal. It is just as wrong to try to say that some kinds of violence against children are OK. Children have a right to equal protection from assault. If anything, children, who are generally smaller and not as strong as adults, have a right to *more* protection.

But young people sometimes say they don't want corporal punishment to be banned. Shouldn't we listen to them?

Certainly, adults should listen to what children say. But as well as listening, adults should also try to understand children.

Some children and young people do say that corporal punishment is good for them. Adults should listen to these children and young people. But they should also think about why children say this.

Perhaps they don't want to think that their parents would hurt them for no reason. Or perhaps everyone around them thinks that corporal punishment is good, and so they think it is normal.

All children have a right to respect and to be safe from violence. Children everywhere need protection from violence just as much as, or maybe even more than, adults.

In this booklet, we have already said that through research, lots of children have been telling adults how much corporal punishment hurts them, physically and emotionally. See 'Does corporal punishment really hurt?'

Many children and young people think that corporal punishment should be banned. In many countries, children are campaigning alongside adults for equal protection from violence.

There is a big difference between beating a child and a loving hit. Isn't banning corporal punishment taking things too far?

No. Beating a child may hurt physically more than a 'loving hit', but they are both violent and they both violate the child's human rights.

When people campaign for an end to violence against women, or against elderly people, they do not say that 'loving hits' should be allowed – they say that all violence against women and elderly people is wrong. So why should it be any different for children?

Talking about 'loving hits' makes it easier for people to seriously hurt children while saying that it is 'for their own good'. Hitting people is not loving behaviour.

Some people say that 'there is a big difference between child abuse and a light hit' – meaning that if a child is not hit very hard, it is less serious. But, however 'lightly' a child is hit, hitting them still violates their right to respect and to physical integrity.

Lawmakers and governments have traditionally said that 'child abuse' and 'corporal punishment' are different things. But most abuse *is* corporal punishment – many abusive adults use violence on children to punish them and gain control. To protect children and respect their rights, all violence against them should be illegal.

Some people's religions say that they have to use corporal punishment. Wouldn't it be discrimination to stop them using it?

No. People have a right to practise their religion – but they still have to respect other people's human rights.

It's true that some people do believe that their religion tells them to punish their children physically. However, this does not give them the right to use corporal punishment. People have the right to practise their religion – but only as long as they don't violate other people's rights. All children have the right to protection from violence, whatever religion they or their parents have.

People with very extreme religious views who believe in severe corporal punishment are often disapproved of by other religious people and by society as a whole. Many important religious figures are now joining the campaign to stop all corporal punishment. At the 2006 World Conference of Religions for Peace in Kyoto, Japan, more than 800 faith leaders made 'a religious commitment to combat violence against children'. The leaders came from many religions including Buddhism, Christianity, Hinduism, Jainism, Judaism, Islam, Sikhism, Shintoism, Zoroastrianism and Indigenous religions.⁶

In some parts of the world, life is very difficult for many parents, teachers and other people who work with children. Banning corporal punishment will just make life more difficult for them. So shouldn't we wait until things get better before we ban it?

No. Children shouldn't have to wait for protection from violence – they need it now.

This argument clearly shows something that most people already know – often, adults hit children to relieve their own stress or anger, not to teach children how to behave. It is true that many adults all over the world have difficult lives and serious problems – but they should not take these problems out on children.

Adults who lose their temper and hit their children often feel very guilty afterwards. In the long run, banning corporal punishment and using positive discipline instead makes life much less stressful for everyone – both children and adults.

Why do you need to make corporal punishment illegal? Can't you just teach parents not to use it?

Just telling parents that they should not hit their children will not stop them. We need to change the law as well.

The law needs to say clearly that hitting children is wrong. This will send out a clear message to everyone. Then, at the same time as changing the law, governments and other organisations should *also* teach parents about positive ways of bringing up their children. We need to change the law *and* offer support to parents.

The idea of making corporal punishment illegal comes from foreign people, not from my country. Corporal punishment is a part of my culture. Isn't trying to make it illegal a type of discrimination?

Hitting children is nothing to be proud of, whoever you are and wherever you come from!

Historically, the tradition of hitting children probably comes mostly from white European cultures. People from these cultures strongly influenced other countries and brought the idea of corporal punishment with them. Today, the only societies where children are never punished physically are small, hunter-gatherer societies.

Corporal punishment is used in most cultures. All cultures should disown it, just as they have disowned other violations of human rights which were traditional to them. Cultures can change, and people can make choices about how they want their society to be. It doesn't matter where a child comes from, how old they are or what religion they have – all children have the right to protection from violence.

There are movements to end corporal punishment of children now in all continents of the world, and corporal punishment in schools and prisons have been outlawed in many countries all over the world.

Why is it so difficult to give up hitting children?

It is true that lots of adults, including politicians, find the idea of banning corporal punishment very difficult. If they didn't, children would already have equal protection from violence!

There are a few different reasons why adults seem to find it hard to give up hitting children:

1. Personal experience. Most people everywhere were hit by their own parents when they were children. Most parents have hit their own children. Nobody likes to think bad things about their own parents or about the way they bring up their own children. This makes it difficult for many people to admit that corporal punishment is a bad thing.

There is no point in blaming parents who have used corporal punishment in the past – usually they were just doing what they thought was normal. But now it's time to move on! Corporal punishment should be banned so that children are protected from violence and have their rights respected.

2. Adults often hit children because they are angry, or stressed. When they do this, it can eventually become a habit – so that if the child behaves 'badly,' the adult automatically hits them. It is difficult to change habits like this – but it is possible. Parents can choose to bring up their children without violence. Governments and other organisations, like charities and religious organisations, can help parents to learn about how to do this.

3. Sometimes, parents don't know any other way to teach their children how to behave. But it is possible to learn other ways. Adults and children can live together and have positive, non-violent relationships.

Won't banning corporal punishment mean that children end up spoilt and undisciplined, with no respect for anyone or anything?

No! Children can learn how to behave without violent punishment, through understanding, respect and tolerance.

Corporal punishment does not teach children to respect adults, or help them learn how to behave well. When a child behaves 'well' because they are scared of being punished, they are not showing true respect for adults – they are only showing fear of them. But when parents show respect for their children and discipline them in positive, non-violent ways, children learn to respect their parents in return.

Corporal punishment teaches children that using violence is a good way to solve problems. But positive discipline can help children learn how to solve problems without using violence. Positive discipline doesn't spoil children – it helps them learn to think about how their behaviour affects other people.

Governments should support positive parenting and help parents learn about positive discipline and education without violence. There are lots of materials which can be translated and then used to help parents in any country.

Won't banning corporal punishment lead to children being punished in more horrible ways, such as emotional abuse, humiliation or locking them up?

Children have a right to protection from ALL kinds of cruel punishment and treatment.

As well as corporal punishment, this includes emotional abuse and humiliation (for example, making a child feel upset or embarrassed on purpose). As well as banning corporal punishment, governments should also help parents to learn about positive, non-violent ways of bringing up children.

Parents who hit their children don't feel good about it – they usually feel upset and guilty. Most of them would like to have advice about how to solve problems with their children. Teaching parents about positive parenting helps them to teach their children to understand, accept and respect rules without using any kind of violence, physical or emotional.

We should move on from hitting and humiliating children. Children should be seen as people, whose human rights are just as important as everyone else's. This makes family life better for everyone.

Wouldn't banning corporal punishment mean sending lots of parents to prison and taking their children into care?

No. We don't want to change the law in order to punish lots of parents.

Banning corporal punishment is not about punishing parents – it is about protecting children.

Children should only be taken away from their parents if they are at risk of being seriously hurt. If not, welfare and support services should be offered to the family instead of taking the child away.

In some countries, all corporal punishment has already been banned. There is no evidence from these countries that after corporal punishment was made illegal, more parents were sent to prison. At the moment, it is illegal for adults to hit each other, but an adult who just loses their temper and hits another adult once lightly is very unlikely to go to prison. The same would be true for parents who hit children. But, changing the law would make it easier to punish parents and other adults who do hurt children very seriously.

Isn't it OK for parents to hit their children to stop them from hurting themselves?

Obviously, hitting a child is not the same as protecting them!

Parents have to use physical actions to protect children – especially babies and young children – all the time. This is a normal part of being a parent. If a child is crawling towards a fire, or running into a dangerous road, of course their parents will physically stop them – by holding them back, picking them up, and showing them and telling them about the danger. But hitting them does not teach them that they must learn to keep themselves safe, or that their parents want to keep them safe.

Of course, banning corporal punishment would not stop parents from physically protecting their children. Adults sometimes have to physically stop other adults from hurting themselves, and this is not illegal. If an adult was about to step out into traffic, of course it would be right to physically stop them. Everyone understands that physically protecting an adult from danger is not the same as being violent towards them. It is just the same for children. In all countries in the world, the law lets people physically protect each other from danger. Making physical punishment of children illegal does not change this at all.

The time has come to end all corporal punishment of children because children have a right to respect and equal protection from all forms of violence now!

Endnotes

- ¹ You can read more about this research into children's experiences and opinions at <http://www.endcorporalpunishment.org>.
- ² The UN Secretary-General's Study on Violence against Children is a huge piece of research about violence against children all over the world. A team from the UN asked many children, adults and organisations about violence against children in their countries. You can read about what the study found out here: <http://www.violencestudy.org/r245> (designed for 12 - 18 year olds) or here: <http://www.violencestudy.org/r247> (designed for 7 - 12 year olds).
- ³ You can read about where all these research studies are published in the adult version of this booklet, which you can get from the Global Initiative to End All Corporal Punishment, <http://www.endcorporalpunishment.org>.
- ⁴ The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) is a set of rules about how governments should respect children's rights. The CRC is divided up into 54 articles – each article states one right that children have. You can read all the articles and learn more about the CRC at <http://www.unicef.org/knowyourrights/>.
- ⁵ The Committee on the Rights of the Child is a group of international experts who check how well governments are respecting children's rights and following the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child.
- ⁶ For more information see <http://www.churchesfornon-violence.org/>

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