



Listen Up!

Children Talk: About Smacking

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Save the Children

Achub y Plant

Save the Children

Save the Children is the UK's leading international children's charity, working to create a better future for children.

In a world where children are denied basic human rights, we champion the right of all children to a happy, healthy and secure childhood. We are particularly committed to listening to, and learning from, children and speaking out about the problems they face.

We use our global project work and research to lobby for changes that will benefit all children, including future generations.

We oppose violence of any sort against children and campaign to end all such violence. In our projects worldwide we work on initiatives to prevent violence. We also support children to recover from violence.

We believe that children have the same right to protection from violence as adults. We are lobbying for the UK law to be changed to outlaw the physical punishment of children.

Save the Children would like to make clear that the image on the front cover of this report is one of a series used to promote the right of children to express their views. The children depicted in the photograph were not involved in the research for this report nor do they have any direct connection with the subject matter of the report.

Children Talk: About Smacking

The physical punishment of children in the UK has provoked considerable debate. The Government has been criticized by both the European Court of Human Rights and the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child for failing to protect children from physical assault yet it has still steadfastly refused to change the law which allows parents and others to hit children through the defence of 'reasonable chastisement'. This report presents the views and experiences on 'smacking' of over 70 young children living in Wales.

Researchers met with children in primary schools and after school clubs throughout Wales and using an alien character called Splodge, asked them a series of questions about smacking – what it is, what it feels like and why it happens. This report presents the answers that children gave and reviews the key messages on smacking that young children have for adults, both parents and policy makers alike. Children's experiences and views on smacking provide a powerful insight into the effect of hitting children and provide a clear message that children are people too and that hitting children is wrong.

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Chapter One: Setting the Scene

Introduction

Children are the only group of citizens in the UK who can legally be hit. Despite changing attitudes in recent years about the acceptability of physical violence towards women in our society and acknowledgement that hitting children is an ineffective and damaging means of disciplining a child, the UK Government still persists in upholding a parent's 'right' to hit their child. Children are people too and whilst the physical punishment of children remains culturally and legally acceptable in the UK, we breach fundamental principles of human rights - respect for human dignity and physical integrity and equality before the law. *Save the Children* is campaigning alongside many other organisations working with and for children, for a change in the law in the UK, to afford children the same protection as adults under the law on assault. This is not about attacking parents – we recognise that parenting is a difficult and important task and we want parents to receive support and encouragement in their important role, but it is about respecting the human rights of children – not as people in the making but as individuals with a full set of human rights.

This report provides opportunity for those engaged in the debate to hear the voice of young children. These are the people most affected by the action, or inaction of policy makers who have the power and we would argue, the responsibility, to change the law and promote positive, non-violent parenting. The report presents the views and experiences of smacking from 77 young children, aged 4 - 10 years, living in Wales. It includes children's accounts of what it feels like to be smacked and also children's own ideas about how smacking might be prevented. *Save the Children* believes that children have much wisdom and insight to offer in all matters of public policy that affect their lives. We have deliberately chosen to listen to the views and experiences of younger children because we know that they are most likely to be hit within the home.

Current laws in the UK are founded on a concept of 'reasonable chastisement'. Following a landmark ruling by the European Court of Human Rights, the UK Government was required to reform the law relating to the physical punishment of children. The Government's response was to issue a consultation paper entitled *Protecting Children, Supporting Parents* (2000). The Government made no provision to specifically canvass the views of children and young people – those most directly affected by the law. However, *Save the Children* and the *National Children's Bureau* embarked on an innovative and challenging consultation project to find out young children's views on smacking. Seventy-six children, aged 5- 9 yrs. from different parts of England took part in group discussions and their views were fed-back to government and published in a unique report entitled "*It Hurts Inside: Children Talking about Smacking*" (1998).

In Wales the consultation on *Protecting Children, Supporting Parents* (2000) was handled by the National Assembly on behalf of the Secretary of State for Wales and the Department of Health. The Welsh Assembly Government stated an interest in hearing the views of children living in Wales and in the short time available *Save the Children* and *Children in Wales* undertook a small consultation project in South and West Wales. Thus the views of some young children in Wales were fed into the Assembly and the Department of Health's consideration of the law as it relates to the physical punishment of children. During 2001 and 2002, *Save the Children* undertook further consultations with children, this time children living in North and Mid Wales.

This report presents the messages from those who took part in the discussion groups in Wales. This chapter sets out the context of the physical punishment of children in the UK and a final chapter considers how we might respond to the children's messages.

Background

The law as it relates to the Physical Punishment of Children

As the law currently stands, children in the UK are not protected from being hit by parents and other carers. Parents have a common law freedom to use 'reasonable chastisement' on their children. This common law dates back to the 19th Century. In the lead case of 1860, Chief Justice Cockburn stated:

'By the law of England, a parent... may for the purpose of correcting what is evil in the child, inflict moderate and reasonable corporal punishment, always, however, with this condition, that it is moderate and reasonable.'

It is interesting to note that when children first received limited protection from parents in the Prevention of Cruelty to and Protection of Children Act 1889, this came over 60 years after similar legislation was passed protecting animals.

Parents and some other carers can use this defence of reasonable chastisement to justify hitting and even beating children. UK courts have acquitted parents who admit hitting their children with their hands or implements, causing pain and injury. This is because judges and juries have accepted such punishment as "reasonable chastisement". Courts in the UK have acquitted parents who have admitted to beating their children with belts, sticks, electric flexes, stiletto heels – causing bruising and other injuries, and successfully used the defence of 'reasonable chastisement' to justify their actions.

In 1997, the Government announced its plan to review this law. A critical ruling from the European Court of Human Rights in 1998 stated that the UK law failed to adequately protect children. The case considered by the European Court - *A versus United Kingdom* – involved the repeated caning of a young boy by his stepfather. The European Court found unanimously that the beating breached Article 3 of the Convention on Human Rights ('no-one shall be subjected to inhumane or degrading treatment or punishment') and that the UK law failed to prevent such breaches. A British jury had acquitted the stepfather, who did not deny the beatings, in 1994, accepting his defence of 'reasonable chastisement'. The Government condemned the treatment of the boy as "cruel, inexcusable and having no place in a civilized society" and accepted that the law related to parental discipline must be reviewed, although they stated erroneously that the case had nothing to do with smacking. Paul Boateng, junior health minister at the time noted that "this Government believes in parental discipline. Smacking has a place within that, and our law will not change in order to outlaw (it)". The Government subsequently announced its plans to issue a consultation paper on law reform. In the event the consultation paper did not even consider the option of principled law reform, preferring to ask respondents for views on where and with what children could be hit.

In November 2001, following its consultation, the UK Government announced that despite the ruling of the European Court of Human Rights it was not taking any action to reform the law on the physical punishment of children. In announcing its decision not to take any action the UK Government stated that the physical punishment of children was an "essential part of family life" in a "responsible society".

In October 2002, the UK Government again came under pressure to re-consider its position on the physical punishment of children. In its consideration of the UK's periodic report, the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child was highly critical of the UK Government's failure to prohibit corporal punishment of children in the family. The UN Committee's report made it clear that government proposals to limit rather than remove the 'reasonable chastisement' defence does not comply with the principles and provisions of the UN Convention. The Committee recommended that legislation prohibiting the corporal punishment of children in the family be adopted and that:

"positive, participatory and non-violent forms of discipline and respect for children's equal right to human dignity and physical integrity, engaging with children and parents and all those who work with and for them, and carry out public education programmes on the negative consequences of corporal punishment."

The UN Committee has consistently stated that legal and social acceptance of corporal punishment of children in the home is not compatible with the Convention. In its first examination of the UK's implementation of the UN Convention, in 1995, the UN Committee recommended that corporal punishment should be prohibited and criticized the existence of the defence of "reasonable chastisement". Since 1993, in its recommendations following examinations of reports from many State Parties to the Convention in all continents, the Committee has recommended prohibition of corporal punishment in the family and in institutions, and education campaigns to encourage positive, non-violent, child-rearing and education.

In 2002, the UN Committee held a General Discussion Day on Violence against Children in Schools and within the Family. Subsequently, the Committee urged all states:

"to enact or repeal as a matter of urgency, their legislation in order to prohibit all forms of violence, however light, within the family and in schools, including as a form of discipline, as required by the provisions of the Convention...."

The Convention and the UN Committee's recommendations are leading to accelerating reform across the world. In some countries prohibition of corporal punishment in schools and other institutions occurred centuries ago. In certain European countries explicit prohibition of corporal punishment in the home predated the Convention. Sweden was the first country to adopt such a law, in 1979. Explicit bans on corporal punishment by parents and all other carers were introduced in the following countries: Austria (1989), Croatia (1999), Cyprus (1994), Denmark (1997), Finland (1983), Germany (2000), Latvia (1998), Norway (1997). In addition, in January 2000 a judgment of Israel's Supreme Court effectively banned all corporal punishment and this has now been confirmed in legislation by the Knesset. In 1996 Italy's Supreme Court declared all corporal punishment to be unlawful.

In the UK, at the time of writing, governments in Scotland and Northern Ireland are set to pursue their own proposals for legal reform. In Wales, the National Assembly does not have power over primary legislation and legal reform is the preserve of the UK government. The Welsh Assembly Government has clearly signalled that it supports the case for legal reform and in areas where it does have the necessary power, it has taken a strong lead in outlawing the corporal punishment of children. In March 2002, the Welsh Assembly Government agreed Regulations that outlaw the hitting, shaking and humiliating of children by childminders in Wales. This is a different line than that taken in England, where childminders are allowed to hit children in their care with the permission of the child's parents. In October 2002, the Minister for Health and Social Services

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of the National Assembly made a statement expressing the Welsh Assembly Government's support for legal reform prohibiting corporal punishment in families. The Minister stated her intention to write to the Minister responsible at Whitehall expressing the Welsh Assembly Government's views. The Minister also stated the Welsh Assembly Government's intention to take action to promote and support positive parenting in Wales.

"The key is to support parents and others who care for children and to promote positive relationships in families. We must seek to change social attitudes so that physical punishment of children is no longer considered acceptable, no matter what context."

She committed the Government of Wales to examining all policy areas to see how positive parenting could be promoted through personal and social education in schools, through its work on Domestic Violence and in the development of a Parents' Code for Wales:

"The Code, though not based in legislation, will provide guidance on a range of issues around positive parenting and family relationships. One of the key ways in which government can help to bring about social change is to set expectations which then shape behaviour. Our Code will help in that way, too. As well as providing advice and assistance, it will embody a set of expectations about the way in which children are treated, contributing actively to the already changing climate of opinion here in Wales."

Members of all parties spoke in support of the Minister's statement, indeed over half of the 60 members of the National Assembly have signed up to a campaign organized by a group known as Children are Unbeatable! – the campaign calls for legal reform to give children the same protection under the law on assault as adults, and action to promote positive, non-violent discipline.

Most recently, the Children's Commissioner in Wales has signed up to the campaign for legal reform. In his annual report, the Commissioner reflects on the messages that children and young people hear from a law which says it is OK for adults to hit them:

"I believe that a country that still allows babies to be hit, and that views assaults on young people as acceptable, is not one in which we are likely to get very far in partnership with our young. Attempts to assure young people that we do respect them are comprehensively undermined by a law that says they are the only group in our society who can be struck with impunity."

To date, the UK Government is still refusing to change the law and provide equal protection to children under the law on assault.

The prevalence of physical punishment of children

The extent of physical punishment of children is more widespread than many people think. Research commissioned by the Department of Health (Smith, 1995) found that two thirds of babies were hit in their first year of life; up to a third of children under seven were hit by their parents more than once a week; more than a third of children experienced severe punishment at the hands of their parents at some time, and a fifth had been hit with an implement. This study which interviewed over 500 mothers of children aged one, four, seven or eleven concluded that the majority of children experience some form of physical punishment in the home. Another study interviewed both parents in two parent families and indicated that studies which interviewed only one parent in the family gave a serious underestimation of the extent of the physical punishment of children (Nobes and Smith, 1997). This study indicated that half of all one-year and four year olds and over a third of seven year olds were hit/smacked at least once a week by their parents. More than a fifth of mothers and fathers had inflicted 'severe' punishments on their children with implements (usually slippers or wooden spoons). Over 90% of the parents interviewed reported physically punishing their children at some time, the vast majority in the previous year. Another study (Newson and Newson, 1989) found that two thirds of people had smacked babies by the age of one and by the age of four the severity and frequency of punishment had risen sharply (more than 9 out of 10 smacked at least weekly). By the time children were seven years old, some people had abandoned physical punishment but almost a quarter were hitting children with implements and a further 53% threatened to do so.

Links between physical punishment and physical abuse

It is clear that not all parents that hit or smack their children go on to abuse them, however, the NSPCC has recently run a campaign to highlight the links between physical punishment and physical abuse pointing out that children who are physically punished are more likely to be physically abused (Henrikson and Grey, 2001). The possibility of escalation from smacking children to hitting them with implements or meting out severe punishments has been shown in tragic cases of child deaths such as the death of Victoria Climbié and Lauren Wright in 2000 and 2001 respectively. A recent NSPCC study of the prevalence of child maltreatment in the UK (Cawson et al, 2000) found that child maltreatment was much more prevalent than previously considered. Almost a quarter of 18-24 year olds interviewed had experienced physical abuse at the hands of their parents during childhood. As the NSPCC points out, the legal and ethical framework in which we work to protect children is highly influential in how effective we can be. The absence of a ban on physical punishment prevents professionals from giving a clear message that hitting and hurting children is wrong. It also acts to inhibit positive and supportive interventions by social services, health professionals and others, contributing to a child protection system that tends to operate predominantly at the much more severe end of physical abuse. Inquiries into child abuse have shown how living in a culture in which hitting children is condoned by law is likely to be a significant factor in inhibiting both victims or members of the public reporting abuse or taking action to prevent abuse.

Attitudes towards physical punishment

In 2002, the NSPCC commissioned a MORI poll to ascertain public opinion on the physical punishment of children and law reform. A majority of people in England and Wales (58%) would support law reform if they were sure that parents wouldn't be prosecuted for 'trivial' smacks. Support for law reform was strongest amongst the post-war generations with 60 % of 16-25 year olds, 71 % of 25-34 year olds and 64 % of 35-44 year olds. Women were also more likely to support law reform (63% versus 53%) as were white collar clerical workers (64%) and people living in households with two or more children (68%). Nearly all those surveyed (97%) thought that parents should not be allowed to physically punish babies (up to 18 months).

Another MORI poll of over 1500 parents with dependent children showed that parents who have been physically punished themselves as children are much more likely to repeat the behaviour with their own children (70%) than those who were not themselves physically punished (20%). The survey also showed that hitting children hurts parents too. Over half the parents interviewed reported physically punishing their children, however, 60% said they thought that physical punishment was the wrong way to discipline children. Half of the parents who reported physically punishing their children reported doing so out of anger or frustration with seven out of ten parents who have physically punished their children reporting feeling sad and apologizing to the children afterwards.

A MORI survey of 998, eight to 15 years olds (Ghate and Daniels, 1997) also commissioned by the NSPCC, included a section on children's attitudes on the effectiveness of different methods of parental discipline. Over 60% of the sample believed that rational explanation, that is 'talking to you and explaining why what you did was wrong' was most effective. Only 11% of children believed that slapping or smacking was an effective method of stopping a child their age behaving badly in the future.

One of the most common arguments mooted by those who doubt the justification for legal reform is that 'smacking never did me any harm'. Up until relatively recently there was an acceptability (or at least a feeling of inevitability) that men hitting women was OK – women were after all the possession of their husbands but thankfully attitudes have changed and behaviour is changing as a consequence. All over the world there is increasing recognition that physical violence is not an effective way for resolving disagreements and that reinforcing the message that 'powerful people can hit weaker people' is not a good basis for the health and happiness of future generations. Those of us who did not suffer lasting physical injury because of being hit by our parents or carers are fortunate but whenever a child is smacked it helps to perpetuate the belief that hitting a child is acceptable. Current laws still see children as possessions of their parents rather than individual people with a full set of human rights. Adults are protected from all forms of physical assault including smacks - why can we not provide the same protection for children?

Another concern is that legal reform will result in the criminalising of loving parents. It is important to emphasise that the campaign for ending the physical punishment of children is not seeking to punish and criminalise all parents who smack their children. Rather the campaign is attempting to get support and assistance to parents with the law only used when all attempts to support and encourage parents from hitting their children has failed. Even then, it is proposed that prosecution would only be used if it were in the best interests of the child. It is necessary to have the legal framework for ending the hitting of children. For example, the campaign to change society's attitude towards domestic violence could not succeed without laws. These laws can, and are, used to prosecute but their greatest strength is in the clear message they give to society that adult violence in the home is unacceptable. We need legal reform and a programme of public education to give an unequivocal message that hitting children is wrong.

The case for gathering the views of children

Save the Children believes that children have much wisdom and insight to offer in all matters of public policy that affect their lives. We actively promote children's right to participate in all decisions that affect them in line with Article 12 of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. We have deliberately chosen to listen to the views and experiences of younger children because we know that they are most likely to be hit within the home. Save the Children believes that it is essential that children affected contribute to the public debate on this issue. As we stated in our earlier publication of the views and experiences of children living in England (Willow and Hyder, 1998)

"Only children can speak from direct, contemporary experience of being smacked; only they can tell us what it really feels like to be smacked and only they can tell us, whether, from a child's perspective smacking is an effective part of helping children be caring and responsible citizens, now and in the future." (page 19)

Save the Children also believes it is important to raise awareness about how children perceive smacking, what it feels like to be smacked - to encourage action in our homes and communities to reduce violence. One observation of the Children are Unbeatable! campaign co-ordinator in Wales is that people opposed to a ban on smacking can and do change their minds if they have the opportunity and time to consider the evidence. Children's views and experiences are a very important part of that evidence. Prior to the publication in 1998, of 'It hurts Inside', the views and experiences of children on smacking had not been part of the debate. This publication presented the views and experiences of 76 children living in England. Subsequently Save the Children has canvassed and published the views of children in both Northern Ireland and Scotland. This report now presents the views and experiences of 77 children living in Wales ensuring that the voices of children from all over the UK are represented.

Chapter Two: Methodology

The consultations in Wales closely followed the methodology used in the English study (Willow and Hyder, 1998). In all we conducted discussion groups in six different areas of Wales. The areas chosen reflected socially and culturally diverse catchment areas, including rural North- and South-West Wales, Inner-city South Wales, Valley Communities, and small towns in Mid- and North-East Wales. The consultations took place in three after-school clubs and three primary schools. Arranging the school based consultations was harder than had been expected due to some anxieties about the subject matter, but the schools who did take part were enthusiastic and supportive. Our invitation was warmly welcomed and staff worked hard in a short space of time to enable the discussions to take place.

Information sheets about the project were distributed to parents and written permission requested for their children to take part in the discussions. A copy of the information sheet and consent form are included as an Appendix.

A few parents at one of the after-school clubs did refuse permission for their children to take part. This was handled sensitively by our hosts. To our knowledge, none of the parents involved with the school consultations refused permission for their children to take part, though we do know that several parents wished to discuss the consultation with the head teacher before agreeing for their child to participate.

Children and parents were advised that children's messages would be reported on anonymously. Confidentiality was guaranteed, other than in circumstances where we received information to suggest that a child was at risk of abuse. In such cases our researchers were required to report concerns to the lead manager who would take appropriate action in line with Save the Children's Child Protection Policy. The topic under discussion meant that we were talking to children about being hit and perhaps inevitably there were occasions when we had to consider whether the hitting a child described – clearly from their own experience – indicated that the child was at risk of suffering significant harm.

Seventy seven children aged between 4 – 10 years took part in the group discussions. Thirty eight (49%) of the children were boys and 39 (51%) were girls. The age range is illustrated in the following table.

Table: Age of Children

Age	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	Total
Boys	3	5	12	7	8	3	-	38
Girls	-	4	9	13	9	2	2	39
Total	3	9	21	20	17	5	2	77

Group discussions involved children of different ages but we did not attempt to group children by age. Our decision was purely pragmatic but the age range in each of the groups did sometimes make it more difficult to discern the views of individual children. In some instances, the younger members of the discussion groups responded anew, as new threads were introduced by the older members of the group. At times one could really witness the cognitive processes working as the children really thought about their answers and listened to the views of their peers.

The purpose of the consultation exercise was explained to children and they were given the opportunity to opt out of taking part before the discussion began.

We used the storybook specially commissioned for the earlier English consultation project (Willow and Hyder, 1998). This featured a green character called *Splodge*, commonly described as an alien who was curious about life on earth and especially smacking. *Splodge* asked the children a number of questions.

Splodge's Questions

- Who knows what a smack is?
- Why do you think children get smacked?
- Who usually smacks children?
- Where do children usually get smacked?
- What does it feel like to get smacked?
- How do children act after being smacked?
How do adults act after they have given a smack?

- Adults smack children but why don't children smack adults? Children smack each other but why don't adults smack each other?
- When you are big do you think you will smack children?
- Do you know anyone who doesn't like smacking? Who thinks it's wrong to smack?
- How can we stop children being smacked?
- What can be done instead of smacking?*

**This was an additional question not specifically asked in the English study.*

The discussion groups were started with a few warm up games. Each session lasted between 30 – 45 minutes. All children were encouraged to answer each question. Two workers took notes and the discussion was tape-recorded.

Chapter Three: Children's Messages

Who knows what a smack is?

Children were asked by Splodge what a smack was. All of the children defined a smack as when someone hits or slaps you. In each of the group discussions, children added qualifications about the strength of the hit or slap.

It's when someone hits you really hard (5 year old boy)

One of the older children defined a smack in more general terms:

"It's when someone uses violent force against you" (9 year old girl)

"Hitting people" (6 year old girl)

"Kicking people" (5 year old boy)

A few children described a smack by its impact and the hurt it caused:

"It hurts you hard" (5 year old boy)

"It's a hit that burns your bottom" (9 year old boy)

Several children talked about smacking with a slipper or other implement:

"A smack with slippers" (7 year old girl)

"Or they could hit you with something else like a slipper or a shoe" (7 year old girl)

"You could, like from behind you get a brush and whack them on the bum with it" (7 year old girl)

"You could, ... when my dad was a little kid, his dad took his belt off and whacked him" (8 year old boy)

One child mentioned a situation in which someone might try to help with a smack:

"When you eat something poisonous, you get a smack on your back to help you" (7 year old boy)

Children in each of the groups demonstrated a smack by hitting their own hands or arms.

KEY MESSAGES

Children said that a smack is a hit – often with some degree of force, and sometimes using some sort of implement such as a slipper. Children told us that smacking hurts.

Why do children usually get smacked?

Children had varied answers to this question, however the most common reason given for children being smacked was being naughty or badly behaved.

"Because they're (the children) naughty, naughty, naughty". (9 year olds girl)

"Because they're naughty boys" (6 year old girl)

"Cause they've done something wrong, that's why they get smacked 'cause they done something wrong." (7 year old girl)

Several of the children described particular behaviours that gave rise to smacks:

"Because they (the children) are rude"
(8 year old boy)

"Because they don't listen to their mum, parents, Miss or nana" (5 year old boy)

"Because they've been throwing bricks at windows"
(6 year old girl)

"When someone runs away, and come back, then they get a smack bottom or a whip"
(7 year old boy)

"Because they've been winding up the grown-ups"
(8 year old girl)

"If they don't do what they've been told first time"
(8 year old girl)

"If their attitude's gone wrong" (8 year old girl)

"When they're being nasty to their mum, dad and their sister" (7 year old boy)

"They could have been telling a lie" (8 year old boy)

Some children thought that children can get smacked because they are being violent to other children:

"Because they are hurting each other"
(8 year old boy)

"Cause they beat up people" (6 year old boy)

One child said that sometimes children get smacked when adults are afraid of what they've been doing:

"Well once I saw this boy and he was walking on the window ledge outside and it was dead high up, upstairs it was, out the window, he was outside the window. And then when he, and then his mum came up the stairs and he saw, and she saw him and he got a big smack." (7 year old girl)

One six year old boy child felt that sometimes children get smacked because "The adults don't like them." Two of the older children also added that they thought children got smacked because the grown-ups liked hitting children.

KEY MESSAGES

Children said that children are smacked because they are naughty. Examples of naughty behaviour giving rise to smacks included not listening, being rude, running away and lying. Some children thought that children get smacked because they are being violent to other children. Children in all the groups talked about adults smacking children, there was no reference to children smacking other children.

Who usually smacks children?

All the children who answered this question mentioned parents and relatives. One group all agreed it was parents who smack children. One child in this group added 'strangers'. Another group said it was parents, nannies or mummies and daddies. A third, smaller group listed (in order) fathers, mothers, grandfathers, big brothers, uncles. At which point an eight year old boy added:

"Grown ups in your family, only the men really"

The rest of the group nodded in agreement and another eight year old boy added:

"and women"

Largely, children felt it was family members who smack children, with some children giving long lists of various family members who might smack children. However, some children identified people who smack children in more general terms:

"Bad people" (6 year old girl)

"Naughty, naughty men" (6 year old girl)

"Your worst enemies" (8 year old girl)

"Bullies" (8 year old boy)

"Grown-ups" (7 year old boy)

KEY MESSAGES

This group of children say that parents and other relatives smack children. The group discussions produced lists and it was hard to judge whether all the adults mentioned did smack children. Some adults may have been listed because they are perceived as authority figures to the child.

Some children expressed the view that male relatives were more likely to smack children than mothers and grandmothers.

Some children also identified people who smack as 'bad', 'naughty' or 'nasty' people generally, or bullies.

Where do children usually get smacked?

This question referred to both where on the body children are smacked and which places or locations children were smacked. Children participating in our discussion groups invariably responded first in terms of place, implying that location carries a significance for children.

The most common location identified by the children was the house or some part thereof. Some children identified particular rooms – the bedroom, the kitchen, the toilet or particular parts of the house – the upstairs. The sense that smacking took place largely behind ‘closed doors’ where no-one else could see was not lost on the children. One nine-year-old girl said smacking took place:

"somewhere where no-one can see – they know that it's bad"

A few children mentioned more public places – the park or the school. The latter location was mentioned by two children referring to children smacking other children. Even in more public places, the need for ‘privacy’ to smack one’s children was underlined by one five year old boy who qualified ‘in the park’, by adding ‘behind the trees’. Children were often very clear that adults intended to keep the smack secret:

"Maybe somewhere on their own. By the lake, by the shop, on their own by the railway station and they don't know and nobody's watching" (6 year old girl)

"Somewhere your mum takes you where no-one can see" (8 year old girl)

However, one child did suggest that choosing a public place for smacking might be important:

"In the garden to show everybody else that you are a naughty girl or boy" (6 year old girl)

Some children had a discussion about where they would prefer to be smacked:

"At home I would rather - instead of getting showed up" (8 year old boy)

"At home, because I'd feel way embarrassed if people see me" (7 year old girl)

Several children also mentioned that adults might pull down a child's trousers and/or pants before smacking, adding humiliation to the pain of a smack.

The most common place on the body for smacking was the bottom. This was mentioned by most children. Children also said they were smacked on the leg and the hand. Some children said children usually get smacked on the face, or part thereof. Other parts of the body mentioned by the children were hands, legs, tummy, arms, nose, back of the head, back.

KEY MESSAGES

The children we listened to said that smacking usually took place in the house where no-one could see. Children indicated that they felt embarrassed and humiliated if they were smacked in a public place - they knew adults did not want to be seen hitting them. The most common place on the body for a smack was the bottom, though children mentioned a lot of other places on the body where they might get smacked.

What does it feel like to be smacked?

In answering this question, children described both the physical and emotional hurt that resulted from a smack. Generally speaking, boys found it more difficult to talk of the emotional pain.

Many children talked about how much smacking hurt physically. Children also described a wide range of physical feelings in response to being smacked

"It makes you feel sad" (8 yr old girl)

"It burns your bottom" (5 yr old boy)

"It's horrible.....painful" (9 yr old girl)

"If you are smacked it really gives you a headache when they shout and smack you" (5 yr old boy)

"It hurts – where it hits" (8 yr old boy)

"It's hard – not nice" (4 yr old boy)

"Sting your bum" (6 year old boy)

"Stings like a nettle and make you would feel sad" (6 year old girl)

"It feels like you've been stung like a bee" (6 year old girl)

"After people smack you, you have a red mark" (6 year old girl)

"Pain" (6 year old girl)

"[Feel like] You're gonna die" (6 year old girl)

"Feel ill" (6 year old boy)

"As if I'm gonna faint" (6 year old girl)

"It gives you a big red mark and it stings a bit" (7 year old girl)

"It feels like you're going to cry 'cause it hurts you that much" (7 year old boy)

"It feels like you're going to cry if you've got someone who's got quite a lot of muscle in their arms" (8 year old girl)

Lots of the children told us that getting smacked makes children feel sad, and or makes them cry. Other emotional responses to smacking that the children talked about were:

"It feels unfair" (7 year old girl)

"Make you grumpy" (6 year old girl)

"It feels bad and it's naughty" (5 yr old boy)

"Upset" (7 year old boy)

"Angry" (7 year old boy)

"Inside your body hurts" (6 year old girl)

Another child told us how sometimes, getting smacked doesn't hurt him too badly, but he pretends it does:

"If I get smacked and I don't cry, my dad looks at me to see if I'm crying and he gives me another one if I'm not crying so I've got to pretend to cry" (8 year old boy)

One child told us that the purpose of smacking is:

"It's to make the person who smacked you feel better" (7 year old girl)

Another child told us a story illustrating how smacking can go wrong:

"I got smacked once before 'cause I was being naughty and being silly and when my mum smacked me I fell back right and whacked me head against my bunk bed pole and I went flying onto my bed and started crying." (7year old boy)

KEY MESSAGES

Children talked about the considerable physical and emotional impact of being smacked. Smacking physically hurts children and has an emotional impact. The children we spoke to do not view smacking as 'trivial' – and deeply feel the impact of a smack.

How do children act after they have been smacked?

Children described how they would feel after being smacked as well as how children behave. All children who answered this question said that children cry and/or would be upset/sad after they had been smacked. Four children said children feel 'grumpy'.

Children had different views as to whether smacking stops children doing that naughty thing again and in two of the groups the children debated the issue.

"(Children) probably behave worse, because they'll go around doing it to other children in the playground" (9 yr old boy)

"If you don't stop, you'll have another smack" (5 yr old boy)

Three children said they thought children 'feel stupid' – indicating that a smack can be humiliating to a child.

Some children also told us the ways that smacking makes children change their behaviour:

"They start being good 'cause they don't want to get smacked again" (7 year old girl)

"They calm themselves down by going up to their bedroom and doing something to calm themselves down" (8 year old girl)

"They go in their bedroom and shut the door" (8 year old boy)

"They go to bed and try and get themselves not as tired as they used to be... They're naughty when they're tired" (8 year old girl)

Some children assumed that it was a stranger doing the smacking:

"Tell your Mum" (6 year old girl)

"Phone the police" (6 year old girl)

Children also talked about the nice things that happen after a smack:

"Kiss Mam and a cuddle" (7 year old girl)

"Feel sad, then happy after saying sorry to Mam" (8 year old boy)

Four children mentioned that they felt guilty after being smacked, and two children said that they would feel angry after being smacked.

KEY MESSAGES

Most commonly after a smack, children cry and become upset; they go or are sent to spend time alone. Some children thought that a smack would make the child behave better; other children thought smacking could worsen a child's behaviour.

Smacking hurts a child's feelings, it doesn't always stop bad behaviour; it can encourage children to smack other children and can be perceived as humiliating to children. Some children remembered making up with the parent who had smacked them.

How do adults act after they have smacked children?

We received very varied answers to this question. The children commonly associated being smacked with angry or bad-tempered adults:

"They get mad and look cross" (4 yr old boy)

"They are stroppy and cross" (6 yr old boy)

"They say a swear word" (5 year old boy)

"They keep on swearing" (6 year old girl)

"Angry" (6 year old girl)

One nine year old child described the way adults would act as "violent".

Another child said she thought adults get cross but added "with themselves". Other children, indicated that the adults would feel ashamed or sorry:

"She'd be sick of the sight of me.....then apologise" (9 yr old boy)

"They feel upset, bad" (8 yr old girl)

"They could feel ashamed" (7 year old girl)

"They could feel like 'I shouldn't have done that' and not been a good parent" (8 year old boy)

"I think they don't want anyone to see. They know that it's bad but they still do it" (8 yr old boy)

Children also told us that smacking makes the adults who do it sad too:

"They feel really sad" (7 year old boy)

"They cry" (7 year old girl)

"Parents feel guilty" (6 year old girl)

"They might want to apologise" (6 year old boy)

One child felt that some adults might not be sorry at all, and even enjoy smacking children:

"Sometimes if they're being quite mean, they could just walk away like that...smiling" (7 year old girl)

KEY MESSAGES

The children we listened to associated smacking with angry parents. Some of the older children said that adults felt regret after they smacked a child.

Why don't children smack adults?

The most frequent answer as to why children don't smack adults was that children are scared and feared retaliation sometimes of a more severe nature:

"Because grown ups are bigger and they slap you back even harder" (8 yr old boy)

"Because adults might turn back and use a greater force" (9 yr old boy)

"They'll get a hiding" (6 yr old girl)

"They'll be grounded for a week" (5 yr old boy)

"Because they'll get told off" (9 yr old girl)

"Because we'll get the same again [another smack]" (7 year old boy)

"If you smack them it's not going to be as hard as they smack you" (8 year old boy)

"If you smack them it won't be hard, but when they smack you it'll be even harder" (7 year old boy)

"The children might be too scared [to smack adults] and it might not hurt the adults" (7 year old girl)

A number of children referred to the relative size and physical strength of adults and children:

"Adults are stronger" (8 yr old boy)

"Children are small" (6 yr old girl)

"Children are tiny" (9 yr old girl)

"Because adults are bigger and children are smaller" (6 year old girl)

"Because Mam is a boss on her children, she's bigger" (7 year old girl)

Only two children said that they thought that children wouldn't smack adults because it was wrong.

"They don't really want to smack them – they know it's bad" (9 yr old boy)

One child said that children don't smack adults because adults don't do anything wrong, and another thought it was against the law for children to smack adults:

"Because they don't want to get arrested" (5 year old boy)

One child felt that if children smacked adults things were likely to get out of hand:

"Children might get out of control and go smacking other people" (7 year old girl)

In all the group discussions there were children who seemed surprised by this question and many were visibly thinking before answering.

KEY MESSAGES

Children don't smack adults because they are scared and fear being smacked back. Children understand relative size and physical strength to be an important factor in who smacks who.

Why don't adults smack each other?

Adults clearly do hit adults and this question had been included to elicit children's understanding and views on how adults deal with anger and frustration between themselves and to hear children's views on the fact that adult inter-personal violence is rarely referred to as smacking. The main responses to this question were that adults know better; they like each other; or they didn't want to start something that might get out of hand.

"Because they have manners" (5 yr old girl)

"Because they know its bad" (6 yr old girl)

"Grown-ups aren't naughty" (8 yr old girl)

"They like other adults" (12 year old girl)

"Because they don't want to hurt their friends" (9 yr old boy)

"If your mum and dad are married and they start smacking each other then they might divorce" (8 year old girl)

"Because they would have to do it back and they don't want the other person to retaliate" (9 yr old boy)

"Because when adults do something to each other, adults have to do it back" (5 yr old boy)

"Becuse then it starts to a fight and they fight smacking and then they start fighting together" (7 year old boy)

"Well because they might be in a pub and they might start smashing glass cause they're getting into a fight and then the police might come and loads of people might get hurt" (7 year old girl)

A few children did speak out against the premise, inherent in the question, that adults don't smack adults:

"Some do" (10 yr old girl)

"Adults do hit other adults" (5 yr old boy)

A few children made reference to other things adults might do instead of smacking each other:

"They quarrel more than hitting" (6 year old boy)

Some children also talked about how they thought adults would feel about smacking each other:

"I think they might be a bit embarrassed" (8 year old boy)

"They might be upset that they've smacked the person that they love" (8 year old girl)

"Because if they smack each other they're not going to be very happy with themselves because they're adults now not children" (8 year old girl)

Several children felt that adults are too 'grown-up' to smack each other:

"Well, normally, like if your mum was married to your dad, normally they have a row instead of smacking each other 'cause it would be a bit childish to smack each other when you're an adult" (7 year old girl)

"If they smack each other it'll be a bit childish" (8 year old girl)

And some children told us that they thought adults would be labelled for hitting each other, especially men hitting women:

"Sometimes when you're in school some people say that if boys hit girls they're a poof, so really if the woman hits the man then the man can't hit back 'cause they'd be, if he'd be a poof" (8 year old girl)

"No they'd be a wuss" (8 year old boy)

One child said that adults don't smack each other because if they did, they would go to jail.

KEY MESSAGES

This question revealed a lot about children's insights into adult's behaviour and relationships with each other. The majority of children did not see smacking as something adults do to each other – adults are perceived as liking each other; they behave well towards each other and they don't want to be get involved in a 'fight'. They also felt it would be perceived as foolish or childish for adults to smack each other.

When you are big, will you smack children?

Two thirds of the children we listened to said they would not smack children when they were big. A number of reasons were given, including the physical and emotional hurt a smack could cause:

"No, because it's nasty" (5 yr old boy)

"Because it hurts" (8 yr old boy)

"We know what it feels like" (8 yr old girl)

"No, because you've experienced it" (9 yr old boy)

"No. Because I'll feel sad and they'll feel sad"
(6 year old boy)

"No. It would be horrible to hit children"
(6 year old girl)

"I won't hit children when I'm a Dad because Dad's give you sweets" (6 year old boy)

"It might hurt them and it's not very nice to hurt people" (8 year old girl)

"Because it hurts a lot and you could send them to their bedroom instead" (7 year old boy)

"Because if you like smack them, it'll hurt them, their feelings and that" (7 year old boy)

"Because children will feel upset and when we're grown-up we'll be feeling sorry for them that we smacked them and I don't want to smack children when I grow up" (6 year old girl)

"I won't smack because I don't want to hurt them"
(7 year old girl)

"I won't smack my children I don't think it's really that fair ... And I wouldn't like it. Treat others how you want to be treated" (8 year old girl)

One child said he wouldn't smack his children for fear of being sent to prison:

"By then it'll probably be the law and if someone found a rash on your child then they'd jail you for it"
(8 year old boy)

Some children told us about the alternatives they would use when children were naughty:

"You could punish them, ground them, [instead of smacking] and if they took the punishment really well, then you could let them go out to play and they won't be in your way" (8 year old girl)

"Just give them a warning if they break the rules, if they don't do what they say then, they'll send them to bed" (8 year old girl)

"I'd just tell them like to go to their bedroom"
(7 year old boy)

Of those children who said they would smack, most said they would only do so if the child was really naughty:

".only if they are very, very, very naughty"
(6 yr old girl)

Examples of what behaviour might warrant a smack included:

".smashing things" (8 yr old girl)

".being violent" (9 yr old girl)

"Swearing at your mum" (8 yr old boy)

"Stealing" (6 year old boy)

"If you give them Ritalin and they still do it you'll have to smack them or they'll just keep on doing stuff wrong, they'll just keep on doing it" (7 year old boy)

Some children felt that sometimes it would be wrong not to give children some form of punishment:

"If they be really naughty, it's wrong to just let them carry on doing what they're doing" (7 year old girl)

"I think you have to smack because if you don't your house will just be a wreck" (8 year old girl)

"Because if they've been really naughty you can't send them to their bedrooms 'cause they might just be naughty again" (8 year old girl)

One child told us that if he did smack children when he was grown up, he didn't want to do it hard:

"Well I've just got something to say, if I would smack children, then I wouldn't do it too hard, I'd just tap them" (8 year old girl)

The answers to this and the following two questions may have drawn a bias in that some of the children may have responded in a way that they thought the researchers wanted to hear. The researchers did not present as 'anti-smacking' but the purpose of the consultation as explained to both children and parents and the very fact that we were wanting to listen to young children's views on the issue, suggested a reform position. This was better understood by the older children.

KEY MESSAGES

Two thirds of the children said they would not smack children when they were big. Those who said they will smack children when they are big would only do so if the child was being really naughty, examples included swearing at a parent or being violent or out of control. Although some children felt that some form of punishment was necessary, they found it difficult to think of alternatives to smacking.

Do you know anybody who doesn't like smacking?

In each of the groups children said that they didn't like smacking and listed adults and friends who children thought didn't like sacking.

"I hate it because it makes my bottom hurt"

(5 yr old boy)

"I know loads of grown-ups who don't like smacking"

(9 yr old boy)

"My family"

"My cousins" (8 yr old girl)

"My friend doesn't like it because she was hit with a big stick." (9 yr old girl)

Most children listed their mums and/or dads in their lists of family members who don't like smacking, even if they had already told us that their mums or dads had smacked them.

KEY MESSAGES

The children we listened to all knew adults that didn't like smacking. Some also knew friends who didn't like smacking.

Who thinks it's wrong to smack?

All but three children said they thought it was wrong to smack, although some children were more vocal than others. Reasons given included, losing control, the pain caused, wrongly punishing a child for something they didn't do and that it is 'bad' to smack.

*"Because, it's wrong because if you do it, you might...
... if you get smacked you might start getting madder and then you'll get smacked again and it could carry on"* (7 year old girl)

"Well, if it was an adult smacking then they might think it's wrong to smack cause they might hurt the child's heart, they might break the child's heart" (7 year old girl)

"Oh yeah 'cause when they do something, like you might think they done something but they never and you might smack them" (7 year old girl)

Those children who thought it was OK to smack said that punishment was sometimes needed. When asked, in what circumstances, the children listed behaviour that would justify a smack:

"for swearing" (6 year old boy)

"drawing on the windows & walls" (5 year old boy)

"breaking new toys and windows" (6 year old girl)

KEY MESSAGES

The vast majority of children who took part thought smacking was wrong.

How can we stop children being smacked?

This question provoked some lively responses and debate in all the discussion groups. There were several suggestions put forward by the children. One was for children to behave:

"Children being good" (5 yr old boy)

"Children behave" (6 year old girl)

Children had lots of suggestions about how to persuade adults not to smack children:

"By persuading them not to do it -.... begging and pleading" (8 yr old boy)

"Put it all over the papers/TV/posters....(posters to say) Do NOT Smack" (8 yr old boy)

"Well you have to tell them, please stop smacking your children" (7 year old boy)

"You could tell them could you stop smacking me and give me a different punishment" (7 year old girl)

Some children wanted to involve other adults and some older children thought the force of law should be used:

"By putting a law in and children could tell their teacher and then tell the police" (9 yr old boy)

"By putting cameras in" (8 yr old boy)

"Put a law in action if anyone sees a child being smacked, any child who says they have been smacked, the person they have told will go to the police and then they'll take it to court" (9 yr old boy)

"Tell the teacher" (5 yr old boy)

"I think that we should make a law to stop adults from smacking children" (7 year old girl)

"You'd have to make it the law no more smacking" (8 year old girl)

"Punish adults if they smack you" (8 year old boy)

Other suggestions were around parents encouraging children to do something different and/or using more effective sanctions or disciplining:

"Do something else what works best.....like losing my pocket money, getting smacked doesn't stop you doing it again" (8 year old boy)

"You could go out and buy loads and loads of books and then always stay in your bedroom and read all the books" (7 year old girl)

"Stop swearing (instead of smacking) put soap, mustard or washing up liquid in your mouth" (6 yr old girl)

One child suggested that encouraging parents to reward good behaviour would help to stop the smacking of children:

"If they are good give them sweets" (8 yr old girl)

Some children gave suggestions for what to do to stop children smacking other children:

"If you get bullied you just tell on them" (6 year old girl)

"Shout at them, then shout for your mother" (8 year old boy)

One child wanted to turn the tables on the adults:

"Easy, lock them in their rooms or ground them so they can't go shopping" (8 year old girl)

KEY MESSAGES

The children had mixed views as to whether children or adults should be the target for reform but some of the children clearly accepted that children have the major responsibility to stop smacking. Some children wanted to try and persuade adults to stop smacking - using familiar media. Others wanted to encourage the use of alternative disciplining strategies. Some of the older children thought a legal process might be best.

What can be done instead of smacking?

This question elicited responses listing a range of sanctions that the children thought would be better and more effective in dealing with naughty behaviour. The group discussions invariably led children to suggest more and more punitive sanctions. In one group the discussion culminated in this comment from a 9 year old girl:

"This boy was really naughty, he was grounded for 2 years and was not allowed pocket money for 5 years".

In another group, a 5-year-old girl said: *"no pocket money for a hundred years"*.

Most suggestions were not quite so draconian! The most frequent suggestions were being sent to your room; being grounded; and stopping pocket money.

Some of the older children had more refined suggestions:

"Stop them doing things they like.....watching their favourite television programme or playing their favourite game" (9 yr old boy)

"Stop them having fun trips" (8 yr old girl)

"Just shout at them [instead of smacking]" (6 year old girl)

"You could punish them, ground them, instead of smacking and if they took the punishment really well, then you could let them go out to play and they won't be in your way" (8 year old girl)

"Just give them a warning if they break the rules, if they don't do what they say then, they'll send them to bed" (8 year old boy)

One child suggested a suitable punishment might be to give the child a task that they wouldn't enjoy:

"Like clean the bathroom or something" (7 year old boy)

KEY MESSAGES

The children we listened to had lots of ideas about what other punishments and sanctions could be used (and often be more effective).

Summary: Children Talking About Smacking - Main Messages

- Children define smacking as hitting; some of them described a smack as a hard hit;
- Children think they get smacked because they have been naughty or badly behaved;
- Children said parents and other relatives were most likely to smack children. Some children (all boys) thought it was more likely that children were smacked by male relatives;
- Children said that smacking usually takes place in the house, in areas where no-one can see.
- Children said smacking hurt physically and has an emotional impact;
- Smacking hurts a child's feelings; children don't think it always stops bad behaviour and they think it can encourage children to smack other children and can be perceived as humiliating to children;
- Children associated smacking with angry parents. Some of the older children said that adults felt regret after they smacked a child;
- Children do not smack adults because they are scared and fearful of being hit back; they understand the significance of relative size and strength. Children said that adults didn't smack each other because they know better, because they like each other and/or because they didn't want to get into a fight;
- Two-thirds of the children who took part in the consultation said they would not smack children when they got big;
- The vast majority of children we listened to said they thought smacking was wrong. All the children knew adults who didn't like smacking;
- Children said that to stop smacking both children and adults have to change their behaviour. Some of the older children favoured a legal process to protect children from being smacked;
- Children have lots of ideas of alternative sanctions or punishments which they thought would be more effective than smacking.

Chapter Four: Responding to Children Talking About Smacking

Children's experiences and views on smacking provide a powerful insight into the effect of smacking or hitting children. Their descriptions of corporal punishment clearly illustrate that when you are the victim, 'taps' and 'slaps' are not gentle and trivial. Children's answers to the question 'What does a smack feel like?' vividly bring home the fact that if you are very small, even a 'light' blow by an adult – someone a lot bigger than you, is, shocking. Smacking is indeed a euphemism for hitting children.

The messages from children in Wales are in fact very similar to the messages received from children in England, Northern Ireland and Scotland. Hitting children not only causes children physical pain but also has an emotional impact. Children recognize that smacking is associated with angry, frustrated parents, is often a reaction or a habit rather than a well thought strategy for dealing with unmanageable behaviour and provokes guilt and remorse in parents after the event. From the child's perspective hitting children doesn't stop bad behaviour and can encourage them to hit others. Children learn that when dealing with bad behaviour or people doing things you don't want them to do - you can hit people - if of course they are smaller than you. Are these really the messages we want to give to our children?

The children we listened to also had many useful suggestions about how parents can stop smacking. They came up with a range of interesting alternative sanctions for 'bad' behaviour – suggestions that showed a real insight into the parent-child relationship.

Some of the questions we asked and the answers we received from children served to illustrate how odd the situation we are in actually is. The question 'Why don't children hit adults?' evoked very strong messages that children are learning about only hitting people who are smaller and more vulnerable than they are. When we asked children 'Why are children are smacked?' the answers illustrated that some children are hit for hitting other children. It is hard to see how parents responding in this way to their children's violence against another are helping their children develop more appropriate ways of resolving conflict. This consultation exercise illustrates that by continuing to condone the hitting of children, we are giving children messages – that all forms of violence are acceptable; and that it is OK to hit if you are bigger, stronger and have more power than your victim.

This is not however about criticising or criminalising parents. Being a parent carries a great deal of responsibility and many parents struggle to provide the best for children despite the pressures of poverty, poor housing and isolation. Being a parent can be very stressful and demanding. Moreover Save the Children hopes that this report and the voices of young children will be used to inform the strategies developing in Wales for supporting parents and promoting non-violent and positive parenting.

Furthermore we hope that the report will add yet another reminder that the physical punishment of children is really a fundamental breach on the human rights of children, hurts children emotionally as well as physically and has the potential to escalate and become physically abusive. It is also ineffective as a form of discipline. The fact that children are smaller, younger more vulnerable and utterly reliant on adults for their well-being, with no strong voice of their own, should if anything, accord them even stronger protection against harm.

LISTEN UP!

Save the Children repeats its call for principled law reform to accord children the same legal right of protection under the law as assault on adults. We believe a ban on the physical punishment of children should be accompanied by extensive and sustained public education and support for parents, focusing on the benefits of using positive and non-violent, rather than punitive, discipline. We hope this report can remind us of the need to identify far more effective, more respectful and less dangerous ways to teach children about acceptable behaviour than modeling aggressive responses within relationships.

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Appendix

What do children think about smacking?

The government is currently consulting on reforming the law on the physical punishment of children. They are doing this because the European Commissioner of Human Rights ruled that the law in this country failed to protect a child who was repeatedly hit with an implement by his step-father.

Save the Children think it is really important that young children have a chance to let the government know their views. The National Assembly for Wales is keen to hear what young children in Wales think about physical punishment and has asked Save the Children to consult with children and feedback their views to the Assembly.

The consultations will be undertaken byA member of staff from the after-school club will also be present.

To assist our discussions with the children, we will be using a storybook featuring a character called Splodge. Splodge will be introduced as a character who is very curious about life on earth, especially about smacking and will ask the children a series of questions (see attached)

The discussions will NOT encourage children to talk about their own experiences at home. We want children to give us general advice and information rather than talk about their personal experience.

If a child does want to talk about personal experiences her/his club/school will follow normal procedures.

The group discussions will take around 30 minutes. We will take notes and if agreeable, tape the discussion. When we have finished all our discussions (we plan to visit three after school clubs) we will write a report to the Assembly. We will send a copy of the report to your after school club.

We will not include the names of children who take part, or the names of the after school clubs in anything we write.

Anne Crowley
Assistant Programme Director

What do children think about smacking?

SPLODGE's QUESTIONS

1. Who knows what a smack is?
2. Why do you think children get smacked?
3. Who usually smacks children?
4. Where do children usually get smacked?
5. What does it feel like to be smacked?
6. How do children act after being smacked? How do adults act after they have given a smack?
7. Adults smack children but why don't children smack adults? Children smack each other but why don't adults smack each other?
8. When you are big do you think you will smack children?
9. Do you know anyone who doesn't like smacking? Who thinks it is wrong to smack?
10. How can we stop children being smacked?
11. What can be done instead of smacking?

What do children think about smacking?

Parent/Carer Consent

Please complete this and pass to the After School Club Worker/Class Teacher

I agree that
can take part in a small group discussion about smacking

Name of parent/carers

Signature

Date