

Stop hitting! Banning all corporal punishment of children

**Questions and answers for
children and young people**



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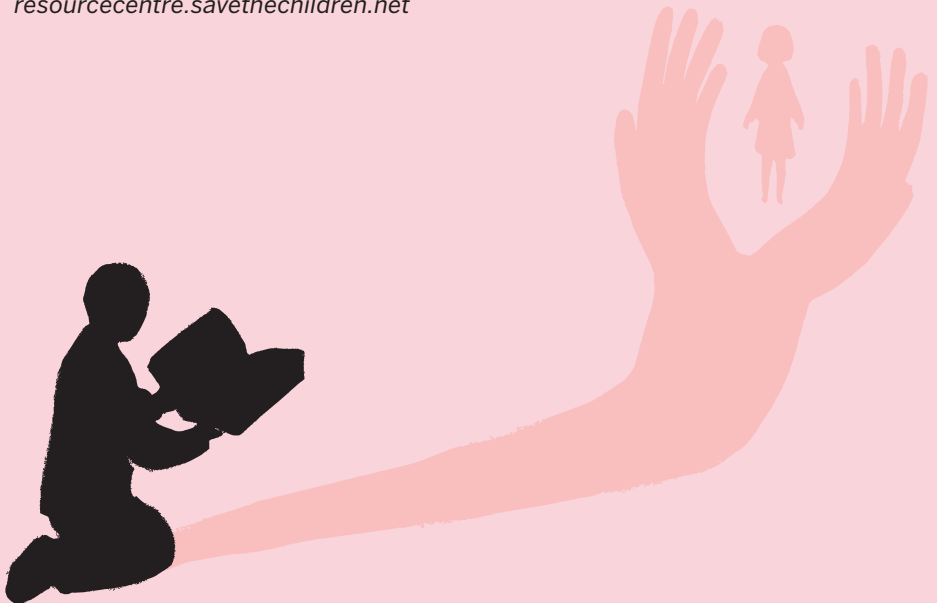
Save the Children Sweden Head Office: Rädda Barnen,

When corporal punishment is used against children it is a violation of their human right to respect for themselves and their body. But despite this it is still very common, and the law in many countries still says that it is OK.

The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child and other international laws say that countries should now ban all corporal punishment of children, and more and more countries are changing their laws to say that corporal punishment of children is forbidden.

There is a list of countries which have already completely banned physical punishment of children at <https://endcorporalpunishment.org/countdown/>

People often have a lot of questions about banning corporal punishment of children. This booklet aims to provide answers to these questions in a way that is accessible to children and young people. There is also a version aimed at adults and a version addressing questions about corporal punishment in schools. Both are available at www.endcorporalpunishment.org or resourcecentre.savethechildren.net



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Glossary

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

Discrimination Treating one person or group of people worse than others without a good reason. For example, treating people of a certain religion badly, or treating younger people worse than older people

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 also be illegal to hit a child

Human rights Basic rights that people around the world agree 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 A non-violent and respectful way of bringing up and communicating with children which encourages healthy development and learning

Prevention Stopping something before it happens

Prohibition When the law in a country says you are not allowed to do something

Protection Keeping something or someone safe. 'Protecting' a child from violence means keeping them safe from violence

Tradition or traditional How things have been done for a long time

Violate If someone's human rights are 'violated', it means their human rights have not been respected

Violence Hurting someone on purpose

What is corporal punishment?

'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, deliberately making children feel scared or embarrassed. 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 or other places where children are detained.

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



What is the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, and what does it say about corporal punishment of children?

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, or UNCRC, is the most complete list of children's rights ever produced. It has 54 articles or parts that describe all the rights that all children should be entitled to. 196 countries have signed up to the Convention – more than any other human rights convention.

The United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child is in charge of making sure that the countries who have signed the Convention actually put it into practice. The Committee has been clear that for countries to properly protect children's human rights one of the things they must do is have laws that ban all corporal punishment of children.

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.

The biggest piece of research is the UN Secretary-General's Study on Violence against Children.¹ 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.'

1. 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.unviolencestudy.org/>

Other research² about corporal punishment tells us more about how it can damage people. 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.

All this research is important. But even if there was no research, corporal punishment would still be wrong. Even if hitting someone doesn't cause them serious long-term damage, it is still wrong to hit them. We know it is wrong to hit adults – and children have as much right to protection from violence as them.

2. You can read more about these research studies in the adult version of this booklet, which you can get from the Global Initiative to End All Corporal Punishment of Children, www.endcorporalpunishment.org or Save the Children's Resource Centre, resourcecentre.savethechildren.net

Most adults in my country 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 adults 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 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 people know about the subject and how the questions are worded.

**“Children have
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Some adults say that being hit as a child didn't do them any harm. Would they still be successful adults if their parents hadn't punished them physically?

Nobody knows how adults who were hit or humiliated as children would have turned out if their parents had not punished them in this way.

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.

There are so many worse things happening to children - why focus so much on hitting?

Violent “discipline” is the most common form of violence against children.³ Thousands of – mostly very young – children across the world are killed by corporal punishment each year and millions more are injured. Hitting children teaches them to accept violence and it might cause them to act aggressively or violently in the future.

When the law allows adults to hit children, it shows that society views children as possessions, less important than people, instead of as full rights holders. Banning corporal punishment shows that society thinks children are important and it has a positive effect on how they are viewed and treated. No country can pretend that it respects children’s human rights, nor pretend that it has a safe child protection system while its law allows violence against them.

3. UNICEF (2014), Hidden in Plain Sight: A statistical analysis of violence against children, NY: UNICEF

Parents have a right to choose how they bring up their children. Should the government interfere even when children are not being badly 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 Child 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 Child has said that corporal punishment is never good for children, and this is supported by lots of evidence from research. It is in children's best interests for them to be protected fully from all forms of violence, including corporal punishment.



**“Parents
don’t own
their
children.”**

**“There
is no such
thing as
‘safe’
hitting.”**



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 breaches their right to respect for and control of their own body.

Lots of research has shown that 'mild' corporal punishment can lead on to more serious violence against children. Research has also shown that adults find it hard to accurately judge how hard they hit children. See 'Does corporal punishment really hurt?' on page 12.

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 or gender can be hit, or that children can only be hit in certain ways. This is an unfair and 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 against the law. 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 less strong than adults, have a right to more protection.

Young people sometimes say corporal punishment is OK. Shouldn't the government listen to them?

Adults should always listen to what children say, and they should also try to understand children.

There can be many reasons why a child appears to support the use of corporal punishment. For example, children often 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. It can be difficult to think differently and to challenge ideas that everyone else seems to agree with, especially when children have not been made aware of their human rights.

All children have a right to respect and to be safe from violence. Children everywhere need protection from violence just as much as, or 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?' on page 12).

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.



Some adults think that there is a big difference between beating a child and a 'loving hit'. Isn't banning corporal punishment taking things too far?

Severely beating a child may hurt physically more than something people call a 'loving hit', but they are both violent and they both violate the child's human rights.

When adults call physical punishment a 'loving hit' or a 'loving smack', they are trying to explain what they see as the difference between being cruel to a child and punishing a child because they love them and want the best for them. They believe that the 'loving hit' is not severe enough to seriously hurt a child.

However, 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? And saying 'loving hit' is actually very confusing, because although it makes it sound OK, hitting people is not loving behaviour.

Some people also 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, even if a child is hit lightly it still violates their rights to be treated respectfully and have control over their own body. There are many more positive ways to help children learn which do not involve violent punishment.

Lawmakers and governments have traditionally said that 'child abuse' and 'corporal punishment' are different things. But most abuse happens when an adult is punishing a child. It is inaccurate to make it sound like they are completely different things. To protect children and respect their rights, all violence against them should be illegal.

Some people say that their religion tells them to use corporal punishment. Is it 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 follow.

Hitting children is against the values and beliefs of the major world religions, which teach compassion, equality, justice and non-violence. Religious leaders are part of the global movement to end corporal punishment of children. At the World Assembly of Religions for Peace in Japan in 2006, more than 800 religious leaders from many religions made 'a religious commitment to combat violence against children'.⁴

4. For more information, see www.churchesfornon-violence.org.

Life is very difficult for many parents, teachers and other people. Should the government wait until things get better for them before banning corporal punishment?

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

This question 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 adults not to use it?

If adults are given guidance that it is better to stop hitting children, but the law still says that it's ok, it is very confusing for everyone, and lots of adults will continue hitting children.

The law needs to say clearly that hitting children is wrong and no longer acceptable. 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 adults about positive ways of bringing up children.



Corporal punishment of children is very normal in my culture. If it is made illegal is that unfair to my culture?

There are many things to be proud of in each culture, but hitting children is not one of them!

Historically, the tradition of hitting children probably comes mostly from white European cultures. People from Europe took over 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, and 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. There are now movements to end corporal punishment of children in all continents of the world, and corporal punishment in schools and prisons has been outlawed in many countries all over the world.⁵

It doesn't matter where a child comes from, how old they are or what religion they practise – all children have the right to protection from violence. Culture and tradition cannot be used as an excuse for violence towards children.

5. See the list of countries at <https://endcorporalpunishment.org/global-progress/global-table-of-legality/>



**“Parents can
decide to
bring up their
children
without
violence.”**

Why is it so difficult for adults 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 the same protection from violence as adults.

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

- 1. Personal experience.** Most adults were hit by their own parents when they were children, and 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!
- 2. Adults often hit children because they are angry or stressed.** When they do this, it can become a habit – so that if the adult thinks the child is behaving badly, they automatically hit them. It is difficult to change habits like this – but it is possible. Parents can decide to bring up their children without violence. Governments and other organisations, like charities and religious organisations, can help parents to do this.
- 3. Sometimes, adults don't know that there are other ways to teach children.** Governments and other organisations can help teach adults about positive discipline so they can live together with children and have positive, non-violent relationships.

If corporal punishment is banned will children end up spoilt and undisciplined, with no respect for anyone or anything?

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

Corporal punishment teaches children that using violence is a good way to solve problems and that it is OK to use violence against people who are smaller or younger than you. Corporal punishment may mean children are scared into showing 'respect' for older people – however this is not the same as really understanding what mutual respect is. In fact lots of research has found evidence that corporal punishment is linked to children being more aggressive, having difficult relationships and showing less respect for others as they grow older.

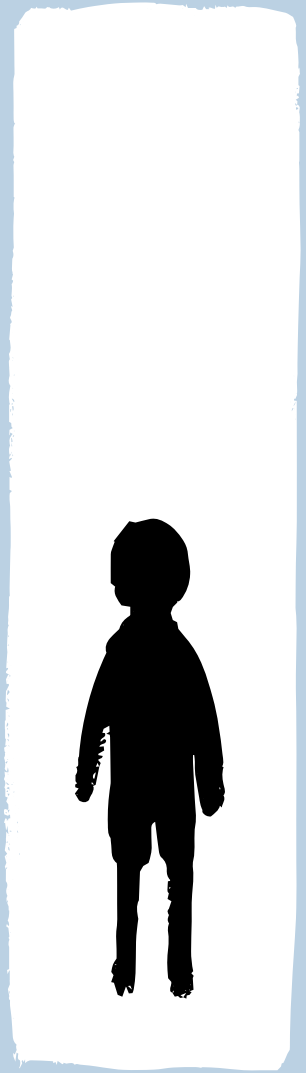
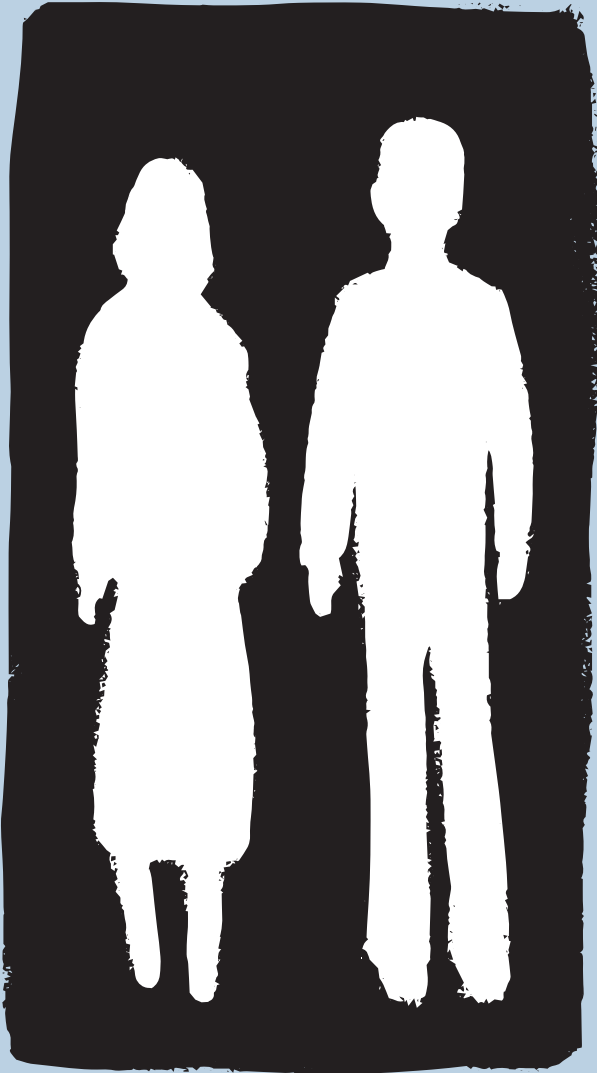
Governments should support positive parenting and help adults learn about positive discipline and education without violence. Positive discipline doesn't spoil children – it helps them learn to think about how their behaviour affects other people. There are lots of materials which can be translated and then used to help parents in any country.

Will 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, deliberately making a child feel upset or embarrassed). 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 usually feel good about it – they often feel upset and guilty. Most of them would like to have advice about how to solve problems with their children. Supporting parents to use positive parenting helps them solve conflicts with their children without any kind of violence or mistreatment. This makes family life better for everyone.



Will 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, and telling everyone that it is no longer OK to use violent punishment.

Children should only be separated from their parents if they are at risk of being seriously hurt. If not, support and education should be offered to the family.

In some countries, all corporal punishment has already been banned. There is no evidence from these countries that lots more parents have been sent to prison. Cases of violence between two adults usually only go to court if the violence is quite serious, and this would be the same for violence between an adult and a child.

But, changing the law would make it easier to punish parents and other adults who do hurt children very seriously. It also means that more efforts are made to support and educate parents to prevent the situation getting bad in the first place.

Is it OK for parents to hit their children to stop them from hurting themselves?

Hitting a child is not the same as protecting them!

Parents have 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 have to 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.

Banning corporal punishment would not stop parents from physically protecting their children, and everyone understands that protecting someone from danger is not the same as being violent towards them.

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

The Global Initiative to End All Corporal Punishment of Children

The Global Initiative to End All Corporal Punishment of Children promotes universal prohibition and elimination of corporal punishment and freely offers technical support and advice on all aspects of law reform.

www.endcorporalpunishment.org

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Save the Children Sweden

Save the Children Sweden is advocating for the prohibition of corporal punishment in all settings. In 1979 Save the Children Sweden contributed to Sweden becoming the first country in the world to explicitly ban corporal punishment. The organisation is working to highlight the issue of achieving a legal ban and elimination corporal punishment and to put the issue on the political agenda around the world.

info@rb.se

www.raddabarnen.se

resourcecentre.savethechildren.net



GLOBAL INITIATIVE TO
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