

MOTION 32 – corporal punishment in all settings

President, Congress.....

Educational Psychologists spend their working lives helping and supporting many children to achieve their potential.

Some of those children have difficult home lives, which can include violence and abuse.

Violence towards children is not justifiable, yet our current laws still allow it to some extent, in the form of 'corporal punishment'.

In the UK corporal punishment was banned in state schools in 1986 and in private schools in 2003. But it is still allowed in the home.

A parent or caregiver can, within the law, smack or otherwise hit and hurt a child.

The law says that punishment must be "reasonable" - however, even when there is physical evidence of severe punishment, it is almost impossible to prove that punishment is unreasonable. The legal test is whether or not the intent was reasonable, rather than the actual harm caused - because this violence is taking place behind closed doors, gathering evidence is very difficult.

Congress, is it right that our laws protect adults from assault but don't protect children?

We have all heard people say that a 'little smack' is ok, but there is overwhelming evidence that physical punishment is harmful to children.

The UN Secretary-General's Study on Violence against Children was the first comprehensive global study to make it clear that corporal punishment both hurts and damages children.

Large scale research has reported that when parents have been asked about the force used when "smacking" their child, two in five of those parents had used a different degree of force than intended.

When force is used in tit-for-tat situations there are changes in brain activity which lead to an escalation in the degree of force used and inaccuracy in adults judging how much force they are using.

Adults also often don't appreciate the emotional pain caused by corporal punishment and the potential short- and long-term damage this can have on individuals and society.

Corporal punishment leads to a lower quality of the parent and child relationship, poorer mental health in childhood and adulthood, higher levels of aggression and anti-social behaviour, and an increased risk of being a victim of physical abuse.

Adults who smack their children usually mean well. They may think it is the right thing to do but smacking children models aggressive behaviour. It says to them that it is ok to use violence.

There are many other more effective ways of teaching children right from wrong than by hitting them.

In a major research study, Professor Elizabeth Gershoff asked young children to describe being smacked by parents – one of their responses?

“it really hurts, it stings you and makes you feel horrible inside”

Isn't it time to stop allowing children to be made to feel horrible inside?

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, which was signed by the UK in 1990, requires the prohibition in law and elimination in practice of all corporal punishment in all settings because it is a breach of children's right to protection from assault.

The Council of Europe, and many other bodies have called for a ban on corporal punishment –our own NSPCC has long campaigned for changes to the law and to our culture to promote positive, non-violent parenting

Sixty countries already have full bans, including Sweden, the Republic of Ireland, Spain, Germany, Portugal, the Netherlands and Poland

In Wales and in Scotland, moves to introduce a ban are now well advanced, with support from both devolved governments.

It is time for a ban to be in place all across the UK.

We do not accept violence in the workplace, we do not allow violence in schools, we do not accept domestic violence between adults in their homes

Congress, now is the time to make violence against children illegal in the UK in all settings, including the home.