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Children are Unbeatable!**

## **'Help at Hand'**

# **An evaluation report of a programme of activities promoting alternatives to smacking children**

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Children are Unbeatable!



the children's charity



**Save the Children**

Achub y Plant



**Dim mwy o greulondeb i blant. DIM.  
Cruelty to children must stop. FULL STOP.**



**communities first cymunedau yn gyntaf**



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## Executive Summary

The purpose of the evaluative research was to provide evidence of:

- The most effective ways to change attitudes towards physical punishment of children
- The most effective ways to provide advice and practical support to parents to reject physical punishment and to adopt alternative, positive non-violent ways of managing their children's behaviour

The Welsh Assembly Government provided funding to cover the costs of the evaluation of a programme of events in Briton Ferry West. These events focused upon offering support to local parents with finding positive ways of managing their children's behaviour.

## Evaluation Methods

The research used various methods including a short community questionnaire, unstructured interviews with parents, focus groups with parents attending parenting groups or courses, and semi-structured interviews with parents attending drop in sessions during the programme of events. We also gathered data from children and young people through a short questionnaire completed by secondary school pupils and a group interview facilitated through puppetry with primary school children. To assist with the evaluation of the process of delivering a programme of events we facilitated a focus group and face-to-face semi-structured interviews with professionals involved in the planning and delivery of the events.

## Key Findings

1. **Attitudes:** From the survey the majority of people in the local community do not think that smacking children is a very effective means of managing children's behaviour. While the majority (80%) thought that children should enjoy the same legal protection against being hit as adults just over half (51%) believed that parents 'have a right' to smack their children. The research suggests that 'hitting' and 'smacking' are viewed as separate actions by adults but not by children.
2. **Getting information:** Many parents said they would not use a phone advice line because the person answering the call is unknown, it is hard to keep numbers to hand when you need them and it is expensive from mobile phones. There was consensus that booklets either give too much or too little information to be of practical use. Parents prefer face to face contact with someone they can build up a relationship with, but felt that access to support was sometimes dependent on which professional you engaged with and their skill level.
3. **Support for specific groups (eg, BME parents, parents with disabilities):** There is a shortage of targeted services to specific social groups, with the exception of young parents. For positive family relationships to develop more

services need to work specifically with fathers and generally act more sensitively to family breakdown.

4. **Practical considerations:** Parental support services need to be very local or provide free transport, covering transport costs is often not of help as public transport in evenings and in rural areas is limited. Support needs to have accompanying free childcare or pay childcare costs.
5. **Crisis support:** Parents sometimes need 'instant' access to support when there is an escalation in a child's behaviour or a crisis point in the family or at school.
6. **Usefulness of courses:** Parents were unanimously positive about the impact of courses and were clear that attending them provided them with new skills and confidence in their parenting ability.

## Key Recommendations

1. **Getting the 'No Smacking' message into the mainstream:** One of the main lessons learnt through the programme of events is that promoting alternatives to smacking needs to be an integral part of the every day practice of all professionals who come into contact with families.
2. **Difficulties in finding support:** Access to information, advice and support is dependent on either being in contact with the 'right' individual practitioner or on situations reaching a crisis point. Parents identified a key role for schools in taking this agenda forward for families with children over 5 and Health Visitors were identified as a key source of advice and support in relation to the under fives. However, training in positive parenting needs to be given to many professionals to a higher standardised level.
3. **Reducing stigma:** Parents feel they are bad parents when a professional suggests they need specialist support. Terms such as parenting course or parenting programme cause further stigmatisation. Stigma would be reduced if support were more freely available as a part of mainstream services and if terminology was changed.
4. **The no smacking message cannot stand as an isolated issue:** Parents who were attending the parenting groups said that they do not smack their children, but struggle to know how to deal effectively with children's negative behaviour. Adults who do favour smacking, present in some of the community presentations, say that smacking never harmed them as a child. To tackle these different views the no smacking message needs to be attached to a larger message regarding the benefits of positive parenting and implemented through universal support and mainstream services.
5. **Promoting alternatives to smacking:** This means providing parents with the tools they need to manage children's behaviour before things reach crisis point. Support needs to come earlier and be more accessible. Accessing support to develop

parenting skills should be presented and practiced as an everyday part of being a parent.

