

Children are Unbeatable!

An alliance of organisations and individuals seeking legal reform to give children the same protection under the law on assault as adults and promoting positive, non-violent discipline

Briefing

(December 2006)

‘Help at Hand’

An evaluation of a programme of activities promoting alternatives to smacking children

Children are Unbeatable! Cymru commissioned a programme of events in Briton Ferry West to evaluate what might change attitudes towards the physical punishment of children, and how to provide advice and support to parents positive, non-violent discipline.

Jane Hutt, Minister for Children, launching the report, re-iterated the commitment of the Welsh Assembly Government to non-violent parenting skills.

She also said: “I am impressed by the way in which the Help at Hand Week has engaged the whole community here in Briton Ferry – parents, children and professionals. I hope that you will be able to keep that momentum going. I was particularly interested to hear that parents put a great deal of importance in getting information, support and advice from local sources, such as their health visitors.

“Earlier this year as part of our Parenting Action Plan, we produced a booklet on managing children’s behaviour for health visitors to use with new parents. From next spring health visitors will have access to a further booklet providing advice to parents on alternatives to smacking. It is our intention that health visitors will give this to each new parent.”

Help at Hand
Was funded by the Welsh Assembly Government
Research undertaken by
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Key Recommendations

- 1. Get the ‘No Smacking’ message into the mainstream**
Promoting alternatives to smacking needs to be an integral part of the every day practice of all professionals in 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 and Health Visitors. Training in positive parenting needs to be given to all professionals to a higher level.
- 3. Reducing stigma:** Parents feel they are bad parents when a professional suggests they need help. Support should be more freely available as a part of mainstream services, and terminology should be changed.
- 4. The no smacking message cannot stand as an isolated issue:** Parents struggle to know how to deal effectively with children’s negative behaviour. Some adults favour smacking, they say 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.

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

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.

Primary School children thought:

Who knows what a smack is?

The most common response was that children get hit or slapped when they have been naughty. Several children simply responded "Ouch!"

What does it feel like to be smacked?

...it stings, causes pain, or said "ouch!"
...smacking makes children feel sad.
...it makes some children feel angry,

How do children act after being smacked?

Almost unanimously, children said they are good after being smacked.

How do adults act after they have given a smack?

One child said that adults act nasty after they have given a smack, but most said that adults are sad and quiet after smacking.

How can we stop children being smacked?

The children discussed a wide range of alternatives to smacking, including grounding, sending to bed, locking a child in their bedroom, banning TV, DVDs, Playstations etc for anything from 2 hours to several days to a year, not being allowed out to play, or to play with friends, having to help mum, shouting at children instead of smacking, or not being allowed supper.

People who answered the community survey thought:

- 75% of people thought that smacking children does not stop them being naughty
- 85% of people thought that you can stop children being naughty without smacking them
- 50% of people thought that it is not ok to smack a child if they are doing something dangerous and 50% did
- Nearly 80% of people thought that it should be against the law to hit children in the same way that it is against the law to hit adults
- 51% of people thought that parents have the right to smack their children
- Over half of people had already seen information or talked to someone about ways of getting children to behave well without smacking them and over 90% of people thought that holding events in the community to provide information and support was a good idea

Young people taking part in the PSE lesson thought:

Parents and carers shouldn't smack because

'it's cruel and they hurt children'
'we don't smack them'.

Does smacking stop children from being naughty?

'it just teaches them violence is the answer'

Seven of the young people thought that smacking children stops them having their rights.

Fifteen out of the sixteen young people thought that adults should have help so that they can manage children's behaviour without smacking: *'Just to talk to them and listen to what your child has to say about you smacking and hitting them'*.



NSPCC

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

Barnardo's
CYMRU

RHOI'R DYFODOL YN ÔL I'N PLANT
GIVING CHILDREN BACK THEIR FUTURE



Save the Children

Achub y Plant



communities first cymunedau yn gyr

'Sdim Curo Plant!
Children are Unbeatable! Cymru



the children's charity

FURTHER INFORMATION

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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.