



RESPONSE TO KEY ISSUES RAISED IN MEDIA ARTICLES: R300 Fine for smacking children 12 October 2007

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Will Parents be fined for hitting children?

The articles carried in the Sowetan and Citizen misrepresent the discussion in the Parliamentary Committee, which focussed on the fact that parents should not be fined and rather that they must have access to early intervention programmes and other support to empower them to parent their children using non violent discipline. This reporting focussed on an option that was not even a vague possibility for the committee.

Will thousands of children report parents?

Currently in spite of laws against serious physical and sexual abuse against children, we have a serious problem of under reporting in cases where parents perpetrate these crimes. It is highly unlikely that children will start to report parents for corporal punishment.

Should light and reasonable smacking be allowed?

Because 'light' and 'reasonable' violence is currently allowed against children, they are also subjected to extremely serious violence which is not taken seriously. The law must be put in place to protect the most vulnerable children not the least.

- Children report being beaten with, leather belts, electrical wires and hosepipes
- Children are frequently given 'a good hiding' which includes serious violence from frustrated and angry parents

Parenting is extremely challenging and frustrating at times, this along with the stresses of everyday life results in the adults' frustration being taken out on the child. Sometimes the child has not even done what they are accused of.

To whose culture does corporal punishment belong?

In South Africa corporal punishment is practiced widely across all different cultural groups and it is a practice that is shared by all. In countries like the USA and the UK, parental corporal punishment is still allowed and widely practiced.

Should parents be the sole decision makers regarding their children? Are children the property of their parents?

The majority of parents make decisions that are in the best interests of their child, however some make decisions that are harmful to children. It is necessary for the state to protect all of its citizens this includes children, importantly the state must protect the most vulnerable. The state has had to intervene in the family sphere previously through the domestic violence act and through laws protecting children from sexual abuse.

Can we teach children right and wrong without hitting them?

Children must be disciplined, without guidance and experiencing consequences for behaviour children may mature into undisciplined adults. Essential in the discipline of children is that adults must set the example that they wish children to follow. Many parents in South Africa raise responsible children without inflicting pain and humiliation. These are skills that must be learnt.

Will this damage families?

The proposed clause provides for programmes to provide parents with education on non violent discipline of their children. It aims to strengthen families through providing parents who use corporal punishment with the opportunity to develop new practices.

Is there a lack of discipline in some schools because corporal punishment was banned?

Corporal punishment is still used widely in the majority of schools. Teachers have been disempowered by a range of issues, including the numbers of children in classrooms and changes in curriculum. The schools with the worst levels of violence tend to be schools that still use corporal punishment.

Will prohibition be damaging to our society?

Although a change in the methods used to discipline children will undoubtedly be difficult for many, by recognising that children learn through example and teaching children to resolve conflict and deal with difficulties without using violence will ultimately benefit our society. 20 countries have banned corporal punishment to date, these include New Zealand, The Netherlands, Sweden and Iceland.

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