

NSPCC Policy Briefing Positive Parenting¹

Objective

To provide an outline of positive parenting techniques, which are promoted by the NSPCC as effective alternatives to physical punishment.

Case study from ChildLine

Melanie lives with her father and 2-year-old Abid. Melanie has had a relationship with Abid's father for four years but they have never lived together. Melanie is White British and Abid's father is of Pakistani Muslim origin, but has lived in Britain for many years. Abid is of mixed parentage. During the relationship with Abid's father, Melanie suffered domestic violence, including physical and emotional abuse; as a result she feels frightened of him. He holds a lot of power over her and controls most aspects of her life. Melanie had little confidence, was isolated from neighbours and was struggling with the job of parenting.

Abid presented with challenging behaviour, which Melanie found difficult. This included lots of temper tantrums and throwing himself to the floor regardless of danger, screaming and moaning for long periods. Abid had very limited language but would make demands on his mother by whining, he had poor sleeping patterns so both Melanie and Abid were exhausted.

Melanie attended a parenting group at an NSPCC Family Centre following encouragement from a neighbour. She learned useful tips to help her to manage Abid's behaviour which gave her confidence. She undertook individual work with the NSPCC, focused on identifying the impact of domestic violence on her parenting and hence on Abid's behaviour. Melanie was able to make links between the stress in her life, her lack of confidence in parenting and her ability to deal with Abid's behaviour.

All agencies working with Melanie and Abid came together to share knowledge and information and clarify roles and purposes. Melanie was able to see that support was available and that agencies were working together to improve the situation for her and Abid. Through the parenting group, individual work and her increasing contact with other support agencies, Melanie has gained in knowledge and confidence. She has slowly made changes in the relationship with Abid's father by helping him to understand the difficulties of parenting. She is now more confident and free to make choices about how she spends her day and where she goes with Abid.

Abid now attends nursery for five afternoons a week, this gives Melanie a break and provides additional stimulation for Abid. He is receiving further help with his speech and behaviour through the nursery. Melanie has more confidence in her parenting and has gained a better perspective; she is now less negative about her abilities as a parent and a woman.

¹ It is recommended that this briefing is read alongside the policy summary on equal protection for children under the law on assault.

Children's Rights

The UK is a signatory to the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989). The Convention is clear about the vital role that parents play in children's lives and the need to support parents to do that.

These include:

- Article 5 States Parties shall respect the responsibilities, rights and duties of parents or, where applicable, the members of the extended family or community as provided for by local custom, legal guardians or other persons legally responsible for the child, to provide, in a manner consistent with the evolving capacities of the child, appropriate direction and guidance in the exercise by the child of the rights recognized in the present Convention.
- Article 18 Parents or, as the case may be, legal guardians, have the primary responsibility for the upbringing and development of the child. The best interests of the child will be their basic concern.

States Parties shall render appropriate assistance to parents and legal guardians in the performance of their child-rearing responsibilities and shall ensure the development of institutions, facilities and services for the care of children.

Key points

The NSPCC considers that the use of physical punishment against children is not only unacceptable, but also an ineffective means of disciplining children. We consider that public education programmes on positive parenting which promotes alternative forms of discipline - on how to discipline children positively rather than punitively - are important for child protection and child welfare in general, and that the Government should fund them. The Triple P Positive Parenting Programme which has been successfully evaluated in countries around the world. The programme has a strong focus on supporting parents to find alternative techniques to physical punishment including smacking. The programme has been shown to have a positive impact on parents and children.

The NSPCC has produced information and practical guides both for parents and professionals on positive discipline and parenting. These aim to educate parents and the public about why physical punishment is never a good idea for children of any age and offer practical support and advice for alternative methods of discipline. They explain that positive discipline builds on a child's desire to please their parents. It does not involve humiliating, smacking or destroying their confidence, nor does it teach them that shouting, smacking or threatening are acceptable ways of getting what you want. Positive parenting is about establishing good relationships with children, and the NSPCC

recognises that this takes time and is an ongoing process, for which parents should have access to continued support.

Many parents say their children are the most important part of their lives but being a parent isn't always easy; it can be challenging and exhausting. At such times parents who are normally loving and caring can find themselves 'losing it' and hitting their children.

Most parents don't think hitting children is right, yet in times of stress, anger or frustration find themselves lashing out. However, many feel guilty afterwards and want to find better ways of handling difficult behaviour.

Why smacking is never a good idea

Parents may believe there are occasions when only a smack will do. For example, your child is really cheeky and disobedient; your toddler runs into the road; one of your children bites a playmate. It can be tempting to think a smack sorts out these incidents quickly, but in fact it does nothing to teach your child how you want him to behave. Instead, it:

- gives a bad example of how to handle strong emotions
- may lead children to hit or bully others
- may lead children to lie, or hide feelings, to avoid smacking
- can make defiant, uncooperative behaviour worse, so discipline becomes even harder
- children feel resentful and angry, which can spoil family relationships if it goes on for a long time.

Top ten ways to be a great parent without smacking

1. give love and warmth as much as possible
2. have clear, simple rules and limits
3. be a good example
4. praise good behaviour so it will increase
5. ignore behaviour you don't want repeated
6. criticise behaviours, not your child
7. reward good behaviour by hugs and kisses
8. distract younger children or use humour
9. allow children some control - choices, joint decisions
10. if a punishment is necessary, then removal of privileges, 'time out', or natural consequences all work better than smacking.

Also see the NSPCC's website for advice on [encouraging better behaviour](#), and other [publications](#) aiming to support parents.

Recommendations

- The Children Act 2004 should be amended to prohibit all forms of corporal punishment of children.
- Positive parenting techniques should be promoted more widely to new parents.

- Government funding should be provided to organisations that work to promote positive parenting techniques.

Related policy summaries

Equal protection for children under the law on assault

Supporting documents/research

UNICEF, 1989. *United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child*. New York: UNICEF.

See the NSPCC's website page on Encouraging better behaviour:

http://www.nspcc.org.uk/HelpAndAdvice/Parentsandcarers/BetterBehaviour/betterbehaviour_wda35993.html

Children Are Unbeatable! Alliance: www.childrenareunbeatable.org.uk

Date last reviewed: **April 2008**

Contact:

Lorriann Robinson

Policy Advisor

Tel: 020 7825 1386; email: LorriannRobinson@nspcc.org.uk