

St John's Ambulance supports the call on the Welsh Assembly to fulfil its promise to ban the physical punishment of children. We are committed to all measures that protect children from harm and promote their health and well-being.

We consider the current defence of "reasonable punishment" for common assault of children (under section 58 of the Children Act 2004) to be dangerous for the following reasons:

- The definition of common assault excludes anything that causes a visible injury to a child but does not exclude assaults that risk serious injury, for example blows to head or stomach, or assaults that cause children pain or humiliation. The law is also potentially discriminatory as children with dark skins are less likely to show bruising.
- A small but significant proportion of parents escalate from 'mild' smacking to serious assaults. This is because smacking, while sometimes effective in stopping a child misbehaving in the short term, is ineffective in teaching the child to behave well in the long term. Parents, particularly those in stressful circumstances, then go on to smack harder.
- Research studies have shown that physical punishment in childhood is linked to many adverse behaviours, including aggression in childhood and adult life, mental health problems, substance-abuse, domestic violence, criminal and antisocial behaviour.
- Even a mild smack may have unintended consequences. For example a blow may hit the wrong target where the child is struggling and, for example, cause eye or ear injuries, or may cause a small child to topple over and hurt themselves on furniture. Thus no smack is ever 'safe'.

Linda Dominguez,  
Head of Safeguarding  
St John Ambulance  
27 St John's Lane, London EC1M 4BU

T 020 7324 4285  
F 020 7324 4291  
M 07956 428671  
Out of hours emergency 07956 428671