

The Children (Abolition of Defence of Reasonable Punishment) (Wales) Bill – our view

The Welsh Government has taken a major step towards protecting children's' rights by introducing legislation to end the physical punishment of children.

If the Bill is passed by the National Assembly for Wales, parents and other adults acting in a parental capacity will no longer be able to physically punish children – children will have the same protection from physical punishment as adults.

Barnardo's Cymru believes that all children have the right to a supportive, nurturing and loving family environment. Unfortunately, however, for many children physical punishment is still part of their upbringing, even though evidence shows that it doesn't lead to better behaviour or decision making.

In fact research has consistently shown that using corporal punishment creates problems for children and their families, rather than solutions. Corporal punishment leads to escalating behaviour problems and has a negative impact on emotional wellbeing and the quality of parent-child relationships.[1]

Fortunately the message is getting through to parents and carers. In 2016 a survey carried out on parental attitudes to managing children's behaviour in Wales found that 76% of parents responding had not used smacking to manage their children's behaviour in the previous six months.[2]

Barnardo's Cymru has campaigned for many years to promote the protection of children from physical punishment of any kind. We are really pleased to see the Welsh Government moving to bring in a law to ensure that children have equal protection from physical punishment. We think the time is right and that the majority of parents and carers will understand and support this move.

Our staff and many of the parents/carers and children and young people we work with certainly agree that this will be good for children and families, particularly in the longer term;

“To hit a child would not benefit either child or parent.” Parent

Hitting a child is not ok under any circumstance.” Parent

“Hitting kids is wrong because it could mess up their mental state and parents could develop a habit of abuse. So it is wrong.” Child

“I think it is about time to change the law as we need to deliver the message that it is not acceptable to use violence against children.

Children will be better protected and by offering different parenting strategies, the benefit will be happier, healthier, better behaved children.

That benefit will be passed to the next generation.” Staff member

“I think it is positive and well overdue. We have known for YEARS that smacking children does nothing to change behaviour, that it is almost always done through anger/frustration on the part of the parent and that children suffer because of this.” Staff member

[1] A.Helmann, Y. Kelly, R.G.Watt. Equally Protected? A review of the evidence on the physical punishment of children. 2015

[1] The Attitudes of Parents towards Managing Young Children's Behaviour National Survey for Wales, 2014–15 – Re-contact Survey. GSR 2016

