

ENDING CORPORAL PUNISHMENT OF CHILDREN



A campaign by *Save the children*

Corporal punishment of children – a global problem

Corporal punishment has become more visible: research has revealed the extent and enormity of the problem.

Corporal punishment violates a child's physical, emotional and spiritual integrity and can have a devastating effect on the lives of children both in the short and long-term. It also negatively affects society as a whole. But only children really know about the physical punishment they suffer, how it makes them feel and how it affects their lives: it is important that opportunities are made for their perspectives to be heard.

Prohibiting corporal punishment by law is vital if children's human right to respect for their human dignity is to be recognised. Without prohibition, the work of child protection and child and family workers is undermined. Although governments have the primary obligation to prohibit and eliminate violence against children, all adults have a responsibility in ending all corporal punishment.

Children's right to protection from corporal punishment

Corporal punishment of children breaches their fundamental human rights to respect for their human dignity and physical integrity and to equal protection under the law.

The United Nations Secretary-General's Study on Violence against Children exposed the nature and extent of children's rights violations and the vast scale of violence against children including the widespread use of corporal punishment.

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) explicitly requires states to protect children from all forms of physical or mental violence (article 19) and nearly every government in the world has ratified it. In doing so, they have made a commitment to uphold the rights of children.

But much violence against children is legal and widely tolerated. In many cultures the child is seen as an object or property of parents but not as the subject of human rights.

Article 14 of the CRC confirms the child's right to freedom of religion. It respects the rights and duties of parents or legal guardians to provide direction to the child in the exercise rights "in a manner consistent with the evolving capacities of the child". But adults cannot rely on religious belief to justify corporal punishment of children.

In recognition of this, a number of religious leaders have emphasised the similarity between the CRC and religious values. They have

demonstrated ways in which the CRC can provide a framework for child advocacy work and with adults and children in peer education.

Religious perspectives

Although the theologies, philosophies and doctrines of the major religions may differ markedly, it is possible for different religious traditions to work together out of a shared commitment to human dignity and a belief in the rights of children to live free from corporal punishment and other humiliating and degrading treatment.

Values of compassion, equality and justice that are deeply held and shared across different religious traditions can form the basis of an ethic for cooperative working and common action.

These universal principles can also be effective tools for examining and challenging theologies, structures and practices which appear to condone violence against children.

Examples of ways in which religious communities have spoken out against corporal punishment and statements of commitment such as the Kyoto Declaration can be used as tools and incentives for faith-based communities to take action and encourage others to work cooperatively to end corporal punishment of children.

Working with faith groups to achieve reform

Religion is a major force in people's lives and many religious leaders are taking a stand against injustice and violations of human rights. Religious leaders often exert influence in both the religious and secular sphere and it is important to engage with them at every level and to involve them at the outset. It is very important to engage with women in faith groups as they are often under-represented.

There are many opportunities for working with and within the religious communities. One of the most effective ways of working in partnership with different faiths is through existing groups such as inter-religious councils and other religious bodies and networks.

There are a number of examples of successful partnership working which can serve as models for initiatives towards reform. Religious leaders have a key role in encouraging the participation of the children in their communities. Opportunities should be provided for listening to the views, experiences and recommendations of children including those who have witnessed and endured violence. Local partnerships can share resources for high quality training and support for all staff and volunteers working with children