

Children Are Unbeatable! Newsletter England

Issue No. 6 – September 2011 (see [website](#) for previous issues)

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Parliament and Government

The riots

Post-mortem debates on the riots in August were disproportionately focused on children. The Prime Minister said on [August 11](#) that it was clear from the television scenes of looting that “a lot of it was done by very young children who should have been under the control of their parents.” Feckless single parents, hardcore juvenile criminality, gang affiliation, poor child-rearing and inadequate discipline in schools were the subject of much hand-wringing though in the event only one in five prosecuted rioters was under 18.

The issue of physical punishment does not appear to have been raised at any point. Nothing was said about its role in creating violent behaviour but neither did we hear calls from the usual suspects for the return of the birch and clips round ears. However it should be noted that Cameron said on [August 15](#), regarding helping with “the way people bring up their children”, that government should be less sensitive to claims that intervening in family life was “interfering or nannying”, which perhaps marks a small step forward for this campaign.

E-petition

Readers are invited to sign Andrew Burchell’s e-petition calling for repeal of the “reasonable punishment” defence: <http://epetitions.direct.gov.uk/petitions/1813> .

Parliamentary support for CAU!

Support for the Children Are Unbeatable! Alliance has continued to grow in the Commons and the Lords (currently totalling 267 parliamentarians). New supporters include Labour MPs and former ministers Margaret Hodge, Tessa Jowell, Dawn Primarolo, Joan Ruddock, Hugh Bayley and George Howarth. New Labour MPs Debbie Abrahams, Ian Lavery, Yasmin Qureshi (barrister) and Nick Smith (former NSPCC campaigns manager) have also signed up to the aims of the Children Are Unbeatable! Alliance.

In the Lords, a number of crossbench peers became supporters of the campaign, including Lord Guthrie of Craigiebank (former Chief of the Defence Staff), Lord Haskins, Lord Hall of Birkenhead (Chief Executive of the Royal Opera House), Lord Hameed, Baroness Hollins (former President of the Royal College of Psychiatrists), Baroness Masham of Ilton, Baroness Prashar (Chair of the Judicial Appointments Commission) and Lord Vincent of Coleshill (former Chief of the Defence Staff). The Bishop of Wakefield has also signed up to support the campaign.

What you can do

We need to reach as many parliamentarians as possible – please write to your MP to ask them to support the Children Are Unbeatable! Alliance. Here is all the information you need:

www.childrenareunbeatable.org.uk/pdfs/caucampaignsheetMPapril07.pdf

If you would prefer to email your MP, you can use this website:

www.writetothem.com (please include this link in your email:

www.childrenareunbeatable.org.uk/pages/signup-individuals.php)

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Child protection

Since the last newsletter, no LSCBs signed up to the aims of the Alliance.

Two short videos have been released, [I can't wait to grow up](#) by the Irish Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children, and [Children see, children do](#) by the Australian organisation NAPCAN (for the prevention of child abuse and neglect). Both carry powerful messages against the abuse of children.

What you can do

- Encourage your LSCB to support the Alliance – especially if they have not yet made a decision (you can see the [full list](#) of supporting LSCBs on the CAU! website (in the organisations, under 'local safeguarding children boards'.)
- Tell us about any local or national possibilities for the Alliance to discuss changing the law on physical punishment with child protection professionals,

and to encourage their support for the Alliance. Opportunities might include conferences, training sessions or informal meetings.

Contact Pat Gordon-Smith on 07528 275646; pat.gsmith@yahoo.co.uk

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“Restraint” in penal settings and schools

The Children’s Rights Alliance for England was granted permission to seek judicial review of the Government’s refusal to notify child victims of restraint abuses in privately-run child prisons of the potential violation of their rights. Abuses include violent swipes to the nose and ribs, yanked thumbs, fractures, concussion and oxygen deprivation. Some “restraints” may have been arguably needed to prevent damage to people or property but others – potentially thousands – were perpetrated solely to “maintain order” in clear contravention of the law, including the law forbidding physical punishment in such institutions.

In education, the Government decided not to implement rules requiring schools to record and inform parents about significant incidents where teachers have used force to restrain or physically control children. While CAU! accepts the distinction between unacceptable physical punishment and acceptable physical restraint of children, it fears that a measure allowing teachers to use physical force on children without oversight or accountability is likely to lead to abuse of these powers.

What you can do

Contact [CRAE](#) if you know a child who has experienced painful or degrading forms of restraint during a custodial sentence, in school or any other setting.

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Faith groups

The Churches’ Network for Non-Violence held a vigil dedicated to ending corporal punishment of children at St Bene’t’s Church, Cambridge on 23 August. The vigil, which was part of a working conference: “Faith and vision into action – ending corporal punishment of children” was attended by the Mayor of Cambridge, Councillor Ian Nimmo-Smith and included intercessions relating to the recent community violence.

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Further information from: info@churchesfornon-violence.org and www.churchesfornon-violence.org

Across the world

South Sudan's independence included the extra bonus of bringing the number of UN member states worldwide banning all forms of physical punishment to thirty. The interim South Sudan Government passed its law in 2005, which provides that "Every child has the right... to be free from corporal punishment and cruel and inhuman treatment by any person including parents, school administrations and other institutions..." South Sudan is the third African country, alongside Tunisia and Kenya, to enact a full ban.

Bangladesh and Belize have passed laws to ban corporal punishment in schools.

To sign up for the newsletter of the Global Initiative to End Corporal Punishment, contact info@endcorporalpunishment.org

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Research

Fatal child maltreatment deaths 2005-2009

A study of all notified cases of fatal maltreatment between April 2005 and March 2009 in England found that 246 out of 276 cases could be classified into five broad groups: severe physical assaults; covert homicide/infanticide; overt homicide; extreme neglect/deprivation, and deaths related to but not directly caused by maltreatment (for example where children commit suicide). Of these the commonest specific group was those children who died as a result of severe physical assaults which were not intended to kill them. Deliberate homicide and covert homicide were less common, deaths as a direct consequence of neglect were rare though some evidence of neglect was found in at least 40% of all cases.

Peter Sidebotham, Sue Bailey, Pippa Belderson, Marian Brandon, "Fatal child maltreatment in England, 2005-2009", *Child Abuse & Neglect, Volume 35, Issue 4, April 2011, pp 299-306*

Detrimental effects of physical punishment in education

A joint US and Canadian [study](#) of 63 young children in two West African private schools with similar intake - parents mainly professionals, civil servants or merchants from the same urban neighbourhood - suggests that physical punishment may have long-term detrimental effects.

In one school, discipline in the form of beating with a stick, slapping of the head, and pinching was administered publicly and routinely for offences ranging from forgetting a pencil to being disruptive in class. In the other school, children were disciplined for similar offences with the use of time-outs and verbal reprimands.

While overall performance was similar in the kindergarten children from both schools, by the first grade children in the non-violent school were scored

significantly higher in verbal intelligence and executive-functioning ability than those in the school using physical punishment.

These findings were reported in The Telegraph on July 28 2011 which also drew attention to the discredited study of Marjorie Gunnoe published over a year and a half ago that claimed that spanked children “did better at school” (see [newsletter 2](#))

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And finally...

Returning home from the Global Summit in Dallas on Ending Corporal Punishment and Promoting Positive Discipline in June 2011, the American campaigner Nadine Block was stopped by security because of the wooden paddle in her suitcase that she had brought to show the delegates. The paddle, which looks like a wide flat cricket bat, is used to punish schoolchildren in nineteen states of the USA. The security officer called it a “potential weapon” and refused to allow it in her luggage. She was forced to leave it behind in Texas. Nadine said: “I told them that almost 50,000 kids are paddled every year in Texas so they need to let the legislature know it is a weapon.”

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