

# Children Are Unbeatable! Newsletter England

Issue No. 12 – February 2014 (see [website](#) for previous issues)

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## Parliament and Government

### Wales

The last newsletter reported the possibility that the National Assembly of Wales might pass an amendment to ban smacking in the current Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Bill, if the minority Labour Government agreed to a free vote.

In the event, the Welsh Government resisted use of this Bill and imposed a three-line whip on all Labour Assembly Members (AMs). The Plaid Cymru and Liberal Democrat AMs who tabled the amendment put it to the vote, which was lost: 14 for, 39 against, 1 abstention.

However the defeat represents one step back and two steps forward, because the Government Minister made the following statement at the end of the debate:

"Whilst there will be other legislative opportunities in the future which are more appropriate for effecting a ban on the physical punishment of children, the Government is clear that it could not support any amendment to the Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Bill to achieve this aim. A change of this nature, without appropriate public consultation, would not be the right thing to do. Whether – and when – a suitable legislative opportunity does arise will depend to a degree on the outcome of the current Welsh Labour consultation exercise on this issue and indications of support for such a change in the law.

There will be opportunities to examine this issue in forthcoming legislation in this Assembly term. It would be good to work on this on a cross-party basis in the future."

This represents a significant advance in the Government's official position which had been that there would *not* be opportunities to introduce a ban this side of the next Welsh Assembly elections (2016). The most likely vehicle for an amendment appears to be a Domestic Abuse Bill, due to be introduced early this summer.

In the debate, Labour AM Christine Chapman said:

“This is the difficult part: we know that the Welsh Government is not going to support this amendment today, believing that this Bill is not the correct vehicle for the change in the law, and I really regret that. However, before I cast my vote today, I will be listening very carefully to what the Deputy Minister says on this issue and, if I am not satisfied, I will vote for this amendment and I will vote against my Government. Given the fact that this Assembly has already voted twice in favour of a ban, I would ask the Deputy Minister to say when, if not in this Bill, the Government will take account of the fact that the children of Wales need the same protection as adults. I want this in this Assembly term. I do not want this issue to be a debate just for today and then we forget about it next week. I want something to happen. We have been at this for a long, long time. I do not want this to fade away, as it is far too important. The children of Wales need our protection and that must come sooner rather than later.”

CAU! Cymru commented: “We are obviously disappointed that Welsh Government has not kept its promise to children and young people on this occasion, and that it was felt appropriate to require Labour AMs to vote against the amendment... We know that it is a question of 'when' rather than 'if' Wales takes this next step. International law, child development, parenting practitioners and academic research is unequivocal. We hope that Welsh Government will soon feel brave enough to allow the National Assembly to do the right thing so that Wales joins the 35 countries which have already made all physical punishment illegal regardless of a person's age.”

You can listen to or read the debate [here](#) (scroll down to 16.43 pm, February 11 2014).

**What you can do:**

This newsletter only goes to CAU! supporters in England – [CAU!-Cymru](#) is separately coordinated – but if any readers have supportive contacts in Wales, please send details to Sara Reid, Coordinator of CAU! Cymru: [sara.reid.cymru@gmail.com](mailto:sara.reid.cymru@gmail.com) .

**Westminster**

Although there are currently no viable opportunities for law reform in England under the Coalition Government, we need to recruit as much parliamentary

support as possible – please write to your MP (or friendly Peer) to ask them to support CAU! Click for the information you need:

- To find out if your [MP is a CAU! supporter](#);
- Suggestions for what to [write to your MP](#)
- For hard copy and online [sign-up forms](#).

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## Physical punishment in madrassas

Baroness Walmsley and Lord Storey tabled an amendment to ban corporal punishment in part-time education in both the [Committee](#) and [Report](#) stages of the Children and Families Bill. They were supported by Baroness Benjamin and Baroness Lister, who said:

“Corporal punishment is corporal punishment; the impact on the child is the same, whether it takes place in a full-time or a part-time educational institution. Therefore, I hope the Minister will support the amendment—or, if not, will explain why.”

However Government spokesperson Baroness Northover said that “violence” to children in these establishments was already unlawful and unacceptable, but that corporal punishment would not be banned. Instead: “the Department for Education is working with faith and community organisations to develop a voluntary code of practice.” There will be a consultation on this code in the spring. In the meantime Baroness Northover has agreed to write to Baroness Walmsley about how those settings which refuse to sign the voluntary code will be identified.

### What you can do

- Sign the [e-petition](#) to the Government to outlaw physical punishment in all part-time educational provision, posted by Natasha Coster
- Write to Michael Gove or your MP to express concern about the Government’s failure to ban physical punishment in all educational and care settings for children including madrassas and Sunday schools. (See ‘how to write to your MP in the [Parliament](#) section above).

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## Across the world

**Turkmenistan** has become the 35<sup>th</sup> country to be confirmed as having fully prohibited all forms of physical punishment of children, including in the family home.

**Public support for a smacking ban in Ireland** Last autumn the Irish Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children commissioned a survey of the attitudes

of 1,008 adults to issues around disciplining children. The sample was controlled to match the known demographics of the population. It included 655 parents of which 62% admitted to slapping a child to discipline them (although three-quarters did not believe that this was “an effective way to discipline a child.”)

Nonetheless to the question: “Would you support a complete ban on slapping in Ireland?” 57% of all adults and 54% of parents said “yes.” By age, support was strongest among the under-34 year-olds (65%), particularly those who were parents of children under five. By class, the middle C2/D/E classes were 10% more supportive than either the upper ABC1 and lower FG classes. The survey also discovered that three in five respondents were under the false impression that it was already illegal to slap a child in Ireland.

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## Research

A survey of 1,600 children living in **Scotland**, part of the birth cohort “Growing up in Scotland”, found that the children who had been smacked once or more by their main caregiver by the time they were 22 months old were twice as likely to have emotional and behavioural problems when they were four than the children who had not been smacked. The study controlled for child age and sex, caregiver age, sex, ethnicity, educational attainment and mental health status, sibling number, structural family transitions and socioeconomic status. ([Early parental physical punishment and emotional and behavioural outcomes in preschool children](#))

Another large study published by the American Academy of Pediatrics in the US, using data from the longitudinal “Fragile families and child well-being” cohort of about 1,900 children, found that children who were “spanked” “regularly” or “occasionally” by their mothers when they were five were more likely to have behaviour problems when they were nine. Children who had been “regularly spanked” by their fathers when they were five were more likely to score poorly on a vocabulary test when they were nine. The study controlled for children’s behaviour aged three and five and for other family characteristics. ([Spanking and Child Development Across the First Decade of Life](#))

Two articles published in *Child Abuse & Neglect* show that attitudes towards physical punishment can be changed by exposing adults to information about the consequences. [Research findings can change attitudes about corporal punishment](#) described two studies where groups of college students and parents were provided with a summary of empirical research findings, both of which found that positive attitudes towards physical punishment were reduced after they read these summaries. The second article, [A brief intervention affects parents’ attitudes towards using less physical punishment](#), demonstrated that a

brief intervention integrated into the primary care visit can significantly affect parents' attitudes toward using less physical punishment. The brief intervention, part of the [Play Nicely programme](#), involved parents listening to the following statement:

“Spanking may seem to help in the short run, but it can actually make matters worse in the long run. Spanking may get a child’s attention, but it does nothing to explain why the behaviour is wrong. You are your child’s role model. If you spank them, they will learn from you that physically hurting someone else is an acceptable way to deal with a challenging situation. It does not make sense to teach a child not to hit by hitting them. It is much better to use other ways such as redirecting to teach your child how not to hurt people. Because there are much better options to consider, spanking is not recommended as a form of discipline. Some justify spanking by quoting the Biblical phrase that says, “spare the rod, you spoil the child.” However, shepherds usually used a rod to guide sheep, not to hit them. Children should not be guided with being hit or spanked, rather they should be guided by setting the rule, redirecting behaviour, teaching why hurtful behaviour is wrong, and getting them to think about the feelings of others. It is likely that if you spare the guidance, your child will develop behaviour problems.”

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