

# Messages about smacking from young children



In 2009, a small-scale research study\* was carried out on behalf of the Children are Unbeatable! Alliance, a group of more than 600 organisations and thousands of individuals which campaigns for children in the UK to have full legal protection from violence.

Forty-five children aged under 5 and eight children aged over 5 took part in the research, via small group discussions in nurseries and other children's centres.

The views of these young children are very relevant to the debate surrounding physical punishment in the UK today. It is to be hoped that their views will be listened to, and that adults who work on their behalf will find these key messages useful in deciding their position on the legality of corporal punishment in the UK today.

- 1. Parents do many good things for their children**, including giving them food and shelter, playing with them and caring for them emotionally.

*"If you colour in a picture, if you take to my mum, my mum says then, 'Lovely, you make picture.'"* (Child aged 4).

- 2. However, children condemn parental violence.** When asked what things parents do that children don't like, violence (including smacking, hitting and kicking) was the most common answer, given by 40% of groups of young children who were asked this question.

*"Smacking's hitting and kicking. No kicking... no spiking, no biting, no punching."* (Boy aged 4).

- 3. Smacking hurts physically.** Several children demonstrated what smacking is by hitting themselves, often with considerable force. Some listed serious physical effects of smacking.

*"If you fall down, you bleed."* (Child aged 4).

- 4. Smacking hurts emotionally.** Children said that children who are smacked feel upset and sad.

*"I don't get sad, only when my mum smacks me... and then, I cry."* (Girl aged 4).

- 5. Children suggest alternative discipline strategies.** Both younger and older children suggested ways of teaching children to behave that they felt were better than smacking. These included talking to the child, removing privileges, and giving rewards for good behaviour.

*"[A parent] might say ... 'You lie down in bed for all the time and you can't go park.'"* (Child aged 4).

- 6. Smacking causes more smacking.** Younger children often made links between adults hitting and children hitting. Older children were concerned that children who are hit may learn to hit others, including their own children.

*"I know! If children smacks their mum, they smack them! If their dad smacks them, they smack the dad!"* (Boy aged 4).

\* *I don't get sad, only when my mum smacks me: young children give advice about family discipline.*