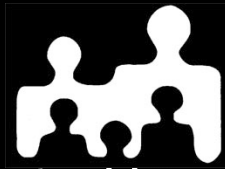




**Save the Children**



**parents advice centre**



# Promoting Positive Discipline

An evaluation of the alternatives to physical  
punishment training project

**September 2006**

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## Foreword

Hitting children breaches their fundamental rights to respect for their physical integrity and human dignity.

As two of the many organisations which believe that children have the right to the same protection from assault as adults, Save the Children and Parents Advice Centre are committed to continuing to campaign to have the law reformed to abolish all physical punishment of children.

While legal reform is essential to provide equal protection against assault for children and adults, we also need to ensure that both workers and parents have appropriate skills, knowledge and understanding of the most effective ways, without physical punishment, of dealing with children and young people's behaviour.

A positive parenting approach enables parents, carers and workers to provide the most conducive environment in which children can thrive and reach their full potential.

In researching the need for this training, evidence indicated that there was a dearth of quality training for workers on alternatives to physical punishment. This was not an indication that child-care workers were using physical punishment but, in some cases, lacked sufficient knowledge and commitment to that belief that physical punishment was unnecessary.

Staff working with children can be a prime influence on the attitude of parents to managing their children's behaviour. Often it can be the staff in a day-care setting that a parent will confide in and turn to for advice, or whose example they will follow.

It is extremely encouraging to see that the evidence from this report indicates that, following participation in the training programme, the attitudes of both workers and parents changed, which can only be of benefit to the children and young people.

Save the Children and Parents Advice Centre believe that this type of training needs to be applied as part of core learning to any setting where children are being cared for. Furthermore the conclusions and recommendations from the research should inform policymakers in respect of child protection and best practice. Without quality training and monitoring we are not in a position to assure ourselves that workers are properly equipped to be managing children and young people. Quite rightly other aspects of child protection have improved and this area should follow.

The many strategies and plans relating to children and young people aspire to outcomes which are most desirable for children and young people's health and well

being. These expectations will falter if they do not include a discipline approach which is non-violent and focuses on positive parenting

**Pip Jaffa OBE**

**Chief Executive, Parents Advice Centre**

# Executive Summary

## Introduction

This report outlines the key findings taken from an evaluation of the Alternatives to Physical Punishment Training Project established as a result of a partnership between the Parents Advice Centre (PAC) and Save the Children, two founding members of the Children are Unbeatable! Alliance (CAU!). The Children are Unbeatable! Alliance campaigns for a change in legislation that will provide children with the same legal protection from assault as adults. CAU! has also been lobbying the Government to lead on a public education programme to stop children being hit by informing parents and carers of effective non-violent methods for disciplining their children

The Alternatives to Physical Punishment Training project started as a pilot initiative in mid July 2003. Initially the trainer was employed part time for 17.5 hours per week, but in response to high demand this was increased to 28 hours from January 2004 and the project extended to run to the end of June 2006. The evaluation of the project covers the period April 2005 to October 2005.

The project's primary aim is to stop children from being hit by adults as a form of discipline. The training package was designed to provide those working with children with an understanding and awareness of children's rights, with guidance and knowledge of best practice methods in dealing with children's behaviour, and also to enhance their ability and confidence in sharing that information with others, particularly parents.

## Project Objectives

1. To provide training that will increase knowledge on alternatives to physical punishment
2. To influence attitudes towards how children should be disciplined
3. To enable participants to have more confidence in their ability to manage children's behaviour
4. To improve relationships between adults and children and influence parents in managing the behaviour of their own children
5. To provide stakeholders and policy makers with relevant and up to date information.

## Methodology

The project evaluation comprised the use of three different questionnaires administered to the participants of 18 sessions (120 participants in total). The questionnaires involved:

- a) a pre-course evaluation form to collect baseline data on what participants wanted out of the training, their expectations and knowledge prior to the course;
- b) a short course feedback form administered at the completion of the 12 hours training;
- c) a post-course evaluation follow-up questionnaire delivered four months after the training to ask if/how the participants had used the training in their work and what (if anything) they had found useful to their work.

120 participants completed the short course feedback assessment, 113 completed the initial pre-evaluation form (94%) and 73 completed the follow-up evaluation form (61%).

## Key Findings

**Prior to taking part in the training programme, participants identified a number of gaps in their ability to manage children's behaviour.**

Many participants clearly stated they were not fully equipped to manage challenging behaviour or to assist parents in managing their own children's behaviour. This was the case for participants working in all sectors, including private, voluntary/community and statutory childcare providers and support services.

- Those attending the course hoped to gain advice on best practice in dealing with children's behaviours (90%), knowledge about methods of discipline to use with children (87%), to gain up to date information on methods to manage children's behaviour (81%) and skills to assist parents in developing ways to cope with children's behaviour (78%).
- The most challenging issues reported by participants prior to completing the training were how to deal with disobedience, tantrums or aggressive behaviour (17%); how to change parents attitudes to dealing with their children's behaviour (11%); and being able to get parents and staff working together to manage behavioural problems (10%).
- Prior to completing the course over one third of participants said they did not talk to parents about behaviour management, and almost two thirds (64%) said they had not talked to parents about alternatives to physical punishment.

**Four months on from completing the training, all participants reported gaining knowledge and/or skills in managing children's behaviour from the course.**

This included:

- best practice in dealing with children's behaviours (90%)

- methods of discipline to use with children (87%)
- methods to manage children's behaviour (81%)
- alternatives to physical punishment (73%)

Moreover, almost two in three reported that they had used the new approaches in their work since completing the training course. The breadth of knowledge displayed after completing the course in terms of the range of techniques available to them indicated that they had developed a much wider knowledge of alternatives to physical punishment as well as a balanced approach using more positive reinforcement techniques.

**A majority (85%) of participants said the course had helped them in their work with children.**

They reported that the course gave them greater confidence, a better understanding of behaviour, a range of different strategies and skills to use, better knowledge about techniques and enhanced their ability to work with children and identify their needs. Two thirds of participants reported that the course helped them with managing children's behaviour in direct caring work.

**Seven in ten (71%) participants working with children reported that the course had helped them to advise and support parents.**

Participants who said the course helped them reported that they were more confident to give advice and guidance to parents, were more able to reassure parents and also to share concerns and doubts.

- 78% had gained skills to work with parents in developing ways to cope with children's behaviour
- 71% said they had developed methods of working with parents and influencing their behaviour.

While prior to completing the training, many participants clearly felt ill-equipped to advise parents on managing their children's behaviour, afterwards 71% stated that the course had helped change this. Participants reported finding it less daunting to speak with parents on this issue, and feeling that they had useful information to pass on to parents.

**Seven in ten (71%) participants stated that they had developed knowledge they could share with parents about alternatives to physical punishment.**

This has impacted on the numbers of participants talking with parents about alternatives to physical punishment – increasing from 36% prior to completing the course to 47%. However, while this is an improvement it remains a concern that more than half have not talked about this with parents. Quite a number felt that this was not their job.

Those participants who had not discussed alternatives to physical punishment with parents said this was either due to a lack of opportunity or a difficulty in approaching parents about this. Only one participant cited a lack of confidence in discussing this with parents.

**More than half of participants (55%) stated that the training had changed their opinion on how children should be disciplined.**

This suggests that a majority of participants may not have come to the course as strong advocates of positive discipline, but that this changed for many of them through the process. The survey suggests that gaining insight into children's behaviour and learning techniques to manage it were important in changing the attitudes of participants.

Of course, many of those who said that they had not changed their opinion may have already been convinced that positive discipline is the best way of managing children's behaviour prior to the course. It could also mean that they are still advocates for physical punishment

## Conclusions

The evaluation of this project would point to a clear need for this essential training in alternatives to physical punishment for all child care staff to ensure that staff have the knowledge base, the skills and the confidence to manage the behaviour of the children they work with and to support parents in developing positive approaches to discipline.

The aim of the project is to deliver real change in the lives of children and young people through enhanced skills, an improved knowledge base and increased confidence of staff working directly with children and with their parents so that physical punishment is no longer an option in behaviour management. The theory underpinning the project is that, as staff become more confident in talking to parents and using their training to explore options of behaviour management, knowledge about alternatives to physical punishment will pass from trainer to child care worker to parent (cascade training) and achieve real change in children's lives both at home and in their child care settings.

The evidence of this evaluation points to the success of this approach as staff are more knowledgeable and skilled with a greater confidence to discuss children's behaviour and alternatives to physical punishment with parents. Staff are now more likely to discuss these approaches with parents who are then more likely to use them in disciplining their children. Further research would allow this to be tested. This evaluation has followed up those who took part in the training to ask them about how they have made use of the skills and knowledge they gained through the course and whether they have passed this information on to parents. A future evaluation of this



project might follow up directly the parents and children to see how the course has directly impacted on them.

## Recommendations on the training project

### **The training should be adapted to meet the requirements of other potential participants.**

The need for training in positive parenting and alternatives to physical punishment is not specific to those working with young children. This course should be adapted to suit the particular requirements of people working with older children and teenagers, as well as children with a diverse range of needs, including those with disabilities.

### **The course could be delivered directly to parents**

While participants on the course have been drawn largely from people working with children, a number of parents also attended and found it very useful in dealing with their own children.

### **Regular refresher training sessions should be offered.**

This would ensure that they are aware of the most up to date information and techniques available. This would also enable childcare workers to seek further advice on any difficulties they have experienced since completing the course.

### **Further research might be conducted to identify the impact of this training on the use of physical punishment in the home**

While the evidence of the evaluation shows that parents have received more advice from child care workers on alternatives to physical punishment, further research is required to identify more clearly if this has led to a drop in the use of physical punishment by parents.

## General recommendations

### **Training in positive discipline techniques should be provided to all people working directly with children**

This evaluation has highlighted a worrying gap in the confidence, knowledge and skills of childcare workers from all sectors in positive discipline techniques to deal with challenging behaviour. As a matter of urgency training in positive parenting and alternatives to physical punishment must be rolled out to all childcare workers across all sectors, and integrated into core training in the future.

### **Childcare providers must accept the responsibility to promote positive discipline approaches with parents.**

Despite reporting increased confidence in talking to parents about alternative forms of discipline to physical punishment, more than half had not talked to parents about this issue three months on from completing the course. Childcare providers must

take responsibility for promoting alternatives to physical punishment with parents, instead of leaving it to individual members of staff to do this on their own initiative.

# **Chapter 1: The Alternatives to Physical Punishment Training Programme**

## **Introduction**

This report provides an evaluation of the Alternatives to Physical Punishment Training Project which was provided through a partnership between the Parents Advice Centre and Save the Children to advance positive parenting techniques and to provide training in the use of alternatives to physical punishment. The course was delivered to a wide range of child care workers and professionals.

### **Positive Parenting as an alternative to physical punishment**

No-one has that magical formula or hand-book that creates the perfect child. Indeed, there is no such thing as a perfect child any more than there is such a thing as a perfect parent. Unless this is understood, parents are at risk of forming unrealistic expectations of themselves and of their children, leading to parents being critical both of their own ability to parent and of their children's normal and natural behaviour. It is vital to realise that all children present with difficulties or problems at some stage of their lives.

There is also the misconception of the "ideal family". Realistically a family is "Any combination of two or more persons who are bound together by mutual consent, birth or adoption" (Dr. John Pinkerton, School of Social Work, QUB). While many of us tend to idealise childhood as a happy and secure time in our lives, for many people this is not (or was not) the case. Dr. Sebastian Kraemer states "While it is true that many of our happiest moments and closest relationships are within families, there is also a whole range of negative experiences in family life ranging from unhappiness, hatred, abuse neglect and exploitation".

While there is no such thing as the perfect parent, the Parents Advice Centre and Save the Children believe that successful parents are able to reflect upon what they are doing in relation to family life, to learn from their mistakes - because they will make them - and are ready to try new approaches to enable them to grow in their understanding of themselves and their children. The development of a child depends largely on the consistency and style of care he or she receives.

The way in which we were parented ourselves is often the main experience we reflect in our own parenting. We bring 80% of how we were parented into our own homes when raising our own children. Indeed, Dr. Sebastian Kraemer, argues that "we start to acquire our parenting skills at nursery school age". This presents a significant challenge when attempting to support parents to adopt attitudes or

techniques for dealing with their children's behaviour that differ from those with which they were brought up.

In Northern Ireland a common means of disciplining children is the use of physical punishment. Despite overwhelming evidence that physical punishment of children is not an effective discipline strategy and that it can have long term negative consequences for the children in question, it remains in common use among parents.

An underlying conviction of the Alternatives to Physical Punishment Training Programme is that physical punishment is neither acceptable, effective nor necessary.

### **1. Physical punishment is not acceptable**

It is known to harm children's emotional and cognitive development and can lead to violent, aggressive and anti-social behaviour in young people. It also increases the risk of violence in adult relationships.

### **2. Physical punishment is not effective**

This method does not help children to take responsibility for their own behaviour or internalise their own moral values. It may lead to immediate compliance, but it does not improve their long term behaviour. The child learns that the use of physical strength and force is an acceptable way of getting what it wants – and that it can use physical strength on those weaker than themselves. Confusingly for the child, however, the most common reason for being hit is as punishment for using force against other children or adults.

There is usually a strong underlying emotional message that goes with hitting – anger, rage, rejection or dislike. Even very small children read and feel these emotions levelled at them.

Parents who use physical punishment are more likely to resort to it when they are stressed, irritated, angry or tired and this leads to **inconsistency** in dealing with children's behaviour - resulting in **confusion** (when the child is treated differently on occasions by parent for same behaviour) and **unfairness** and **resentment** (where siblings are treated differently depending on parents mood). When the use of physical punishment depends on the mood of the parent, this also increases the risk of **escalation** (going further than intended).

### **3. Physical punishment is not necessary**

There are a wide range of positive discipline techniques that have been developed to deal with challenging behaviour that have proved more effective than physical punishment. However, to change how children are disciplined at home can call for a major adult unlearning and new learning process.

A positive parenting approach to disciplining children is a framework of:

- a) Positive role modelling, consistently demonstrating the behaviour that is expected of the child
- b) Agreed rules and boundaries, explaining clearly to children what is expected from them,
- c) Agreed rewards for positive behaviour (not necessarily material items)
- d) Agreed sanctions for unacceptable behaviour

Discipline is viewed as a teaching rather than a punishment process:

- Helping a child understand why certain behaviour is unacceptable
- Helping a child to take responsibility for him/herself and his/her actions
- Helping a child internalise his/her own moral values.

## Background to the Alternatives to Physical Punishment Training Project

This report outlines key findings taken from an evaluation of the Alternatives to Physical Punishment Training Project established as a result of a partnership arrangement between Parents Advice Centre (PAC) and Save the Children, two founder members of the Children are Unbeatable! Alliance. The Children are Unbeatable! Alliance campaigns for a change in legislation that will provide children with the same legal protection from assault as adults. CAU! has also been lobbying the Government to lead on a public education programme to stop children being hit by informing parents and carers of effective non-violent methods of dealing with children's behaviour.

### **The partnership between Save the Children and the Parents Advice Centre**

The ultimate aim of Save the Children's work with children is to contribute to the realization of children's rights which would be reflected in positive and lasting changes in the lives of children and young people. Save the Children seeks to bring about these changes in five ways:

1. Changes in the lives of children and young people
2. Changes in policy and practice affecting children and young people's rights
3. Changes in children's and young people's participation and active citizenship
4. Changes in equity and non-discrimination of children and young people
5. Changes in civil society and communities' capacity to support children's rights

The Parents Advice Centre aims to help parents and other family members to improve their ability to function within the family by providing support, guiding

individuals to find their own solutions and providing basic counselling. This approach seeks to encourage family members to reach their full potential and to promote positive parenting in the community. A central belief of PAC is that all members within a family deserve to have their human rights protected and respected and that the safety and wellbeing of children is paramount.

The two organisations identified a clear overlap in their aims around promoting the protection of children, and positive parenting methods. They decided to work together in partnership on a training project on positive parenting – the Alternatives to Physical Punishment Training.

### **Development of the project**

The Alternatives to Physical Punishment Training project started as a pilot initiative in mid July 2003 for a period of 12 months. This training project was set up following an extensive piece of research carried out on behalf of Save the Children and PAC in relation to the availability of quality parenting programmes and support initiatives that were available to parents in Northern Ireland. The study highlighted the fact that there was a dearth of quality programmes in relation to positive approaches to dealing with children's behaviour. PAC's telephone help-line records have also verified that two of the main topics of telephone callers at present are 1) dealing with children's behaviour and 2) bullying.

Initially the trainer for the new pilot project was employed on a part-time basis of 17½ hours per week, however due to the response and demand for training this was increased to 28 hours from January 2004 and also extended to 31 March 2005. It was further extended, taking it to the end of June 2006. This evaluation covers the period April 2005 to October 2005.

### **Aims and objectives of the project**

The project's primary aim was to stop children from being hit by adults as a form of discipline. It had five objectives:

1. To provide training that will increase knowledge on alternatives to physical punishment
2. To influence attitudes or change opinions on how children should be disciplined
3. To enable participants to have more confidence in their ability to manage children's behaviour
4. To improve relationships between adults and children and influence parents in the behaviour management of their own children
5. To provide stakeholders and policymakers with relevant and up to date information.

The training taught and promoted the use of non-violent approaches to disciplining children and sought to improve practice and attitudes. It was intended that participants would influence the behaviour of the parents they work with and hence reduce the numbers of children being hit by their parents.

This training package was designed to provide workers with an understanding and awareness of children's rights, with guidance and knowledge of best practice methods in dealing with children's behaviour and also to enhance their ability and confidence in sharing that information with others, particularly parents.

### **The intended impact of the project**

Save the Children UK has developed a methodology for monitoring the impact of its work, using *Global Impact Monitoring* (GIM) and Save the Children's five dimensions of change listed above.

The intended impact of the project was to bring *changes in the lives of children and young people* by:

- providing training that would increase knowledge about alternatives to physical punishment (objective 1)
- improving relationships between adults and children and influencing parents in the behaviour management of their own children (objective 4)
- influencing attitudes or changing opinions on how children should be disciplined (objective 2)
- enabling participants to have more confidence in their ability to manage children's behaviour (objective 3).

In addition, the project aimed to influence *changes in policy and practice affecting children's and young people's rights* by:

- providing stakeholders and policymakers with relevant and up to date information (objective 5), and,
- providing training that would increase the knowledge on alternatives to physical punishment (objective 1)

The project provided guidance on best practice on the rights and best interests of children and actively promoted participants to examine their internal policies and practices in relation to behaviour management. To this end it aimed to bring about *changes in equity and non-discrimination of children and young people* by :

- providing stakeholders and policymakers with relevant and up to date information (objective 5)
- providing training that will increase the knowledge on alternatives to physical punishment (objective 1), and,

- enabling participants to have more confidence in their ability to manage children's behaviour (objective 3).

## **Content of programme**

The main module headings of the programme were:

- a) The general concept of physical punishment including perceptions, prejudices and myths
- b) The legal context – locally, nationally and internationally
- c) Child development, in particular behavioural development and needs of children
- d) Understanding families' stresses and strains
- e) Suggested alternatives to physical punishment
- f) Examining some best practice models

More details on the course content can be found in the appendix.

## **Delivery of training**

The complete training programme took 12 hours. The trainer negotiated with the individual organisations to deliver in session lengths that suited their needs. The most popular were:

- 4 x 3 hour sessions (over 4 weeks)
- 3 x 4 hour sessions (over 3 weeks)
- 2 full days (together or over 2 weeks)

Starting times varied from 9am to 7pm.

Over the whole year 235 participants took part in the training. Numbers of sessions per group varied but the preferred format was four three-hour sessions. There were 85 sessions in all delivered through Northern Ireland.

## **Range of participants and geographical spread of training**

The training was offered to organisations that had staff whose work brought them into contact with children and parents. This included statutory, voluntary and private sector employees. The trainer travelled to the individual organisation's choice of venues throughout Northern Ireland as long as they brought together the minimum required number of participants. The range of participants was very diverse and included:

*Teachers*  
*Nursery School Principals*  
*Social Workers*  
*Health Visitors*  
*Family Centre Workers*

*Teachers Assistants* *Nurses*  
*Classroom Assistants* *Creche Staff*  
*Youth Workers*  
*Family Support Workers*  
*Foster/Adoptive Parents*



<i>Women Aid Staff</i>	<i>Surestart Workers</i>
<i>Young Parents</i>	<i>Family Workers</i>
<i>Social Worker Assistants.</i>	<i>Anti- and post-natal Dep. Workers</i>
<i>Parenting Group Workers</i>	<i>Special Needs Teachers</i>
<i>Creative Arts &amp; Play Therapists</i>	<i>Private Day Care Staff</i>

The range of organisations represented included:

<i>Family and community support groups</i>	<i>Private day care</i>
<i>Surestarts</i>	<i>Schools</i>
<i>Nursery groups</i>	<i>Youth organisations</i>
<i>Cross community groups</i>	<i>Community groups</i>
<i>Women's Groups</i>	<i>HSS Trusts</i>
<i>Afterschool clubs</i>	<i>Parents groups</i>

### **Evaluation methodology**

The project evaluation comprised the use of a series of three questionnaires administered to the participants of 18 sessions (120 participants in total). The questionnaires involved were as follows:

1. a short form on course feedback administered after the 12 hours training
2. a pre-course evaluation form to collect baseline data on what participants wanted out of the training, their expectations and knowledge prior to the course
3. a post-course evaluation questionnaire delivered four months after the training to ask if/how the participant had used the training in their work and what (if anything) they had found useful to their work.

120 participants completed the short course feedback assessment, 113 completed the initial pre-evaluation form (94%) and 73 completed the follow-up post-evaluation form (61%).

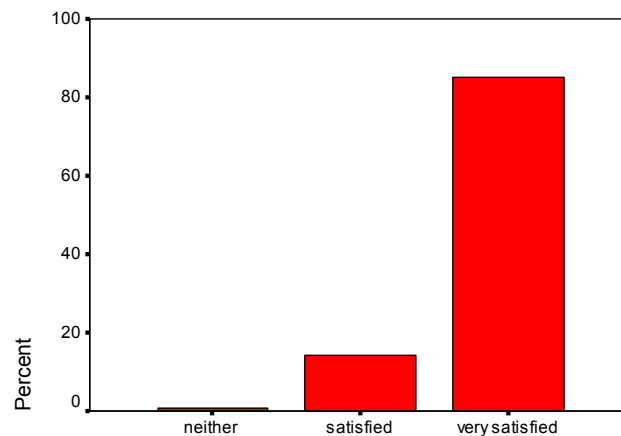
## Chapter 2: The findings of the evaluation

### 1) Course Assessment Questionnaire

A brief questionnaire was completed about the training delivery including venue, length of sessions, style of facilitator and overall satisfaction as well as initial comments on the course. Completed questionnaires were received for 120 participants.

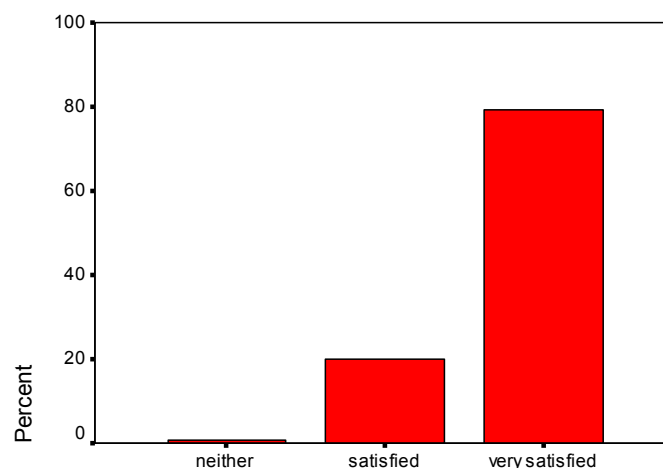
Over three quarters (75%) found the venue of their course satisfactory (12% said neither satisfied or dissatisfied with the venue), and while 90 per cent were satisfied with the length of the sessions, 3 participants were dissatisfied with the length of sessions.

Figure 1: Issues covered in training



The feedback on the training was overwhelmingly positive. Nearly all the participants said they were satisfied with the training sessions (99%), the style of facilitator (99%) and with the issues covered in the training sessions (99%). No participants said that they were dissatisfied with the course.

Figure 2: Overall level of satisfaction



In general, the comments made on the short course assessment form were very positive, with participants finding the course informative, interesting, enjoyable and valuable. Some commented that they had gained new knowledge particularly in behaviour management and that the training had changed their attitude and style of disciplining. There were few suggestions for improvements to the course - one participant remarked that the sessions were too long, another stated that parts of the training was repetitive and two participants asked for more information about managing behaviour of older children.

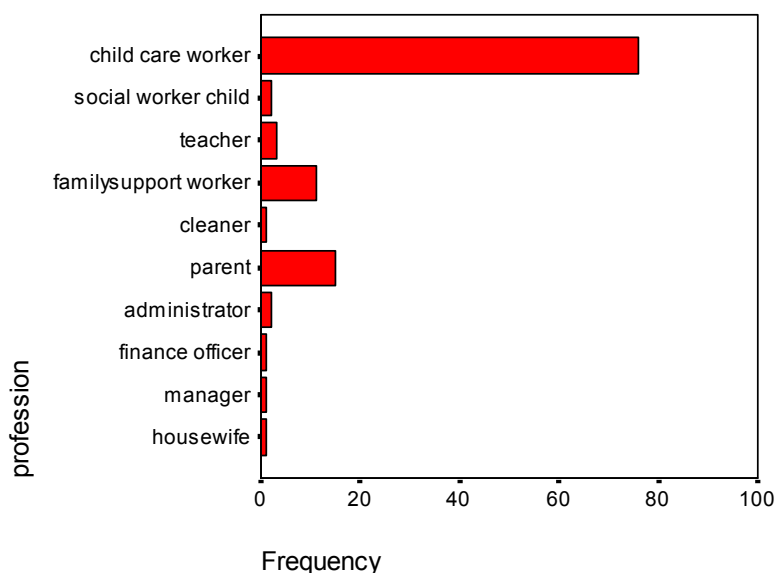
## 2) Baseline Evaluation Questionnaire

At the beginning of the first session of the training course participants were asked to complete a pre-course evaluation form which asked about their expectations and hopes for the course and also asked about current methods and approaches used in their work. This was designed to collect baseline information against which to track changes in attitudes and behaviour and to evaluate the success of the project.

### Individuals and organisations participating in the training

The questionnaire asked a range of background questions about the participants' profession, age, gender and the organisation worked for to enable some more detailed analysis of the results.

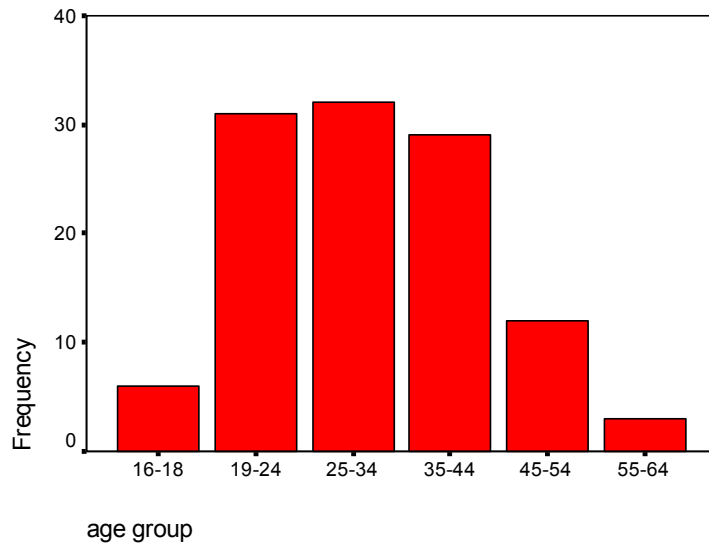
Figure 3: Profession of participants



The majority of those attending the course were child care workers (67%) or family support workers (10%) while a further 13% were parents. Two social workers and 3 teachers and 4 administrative/management staff also attended the training.

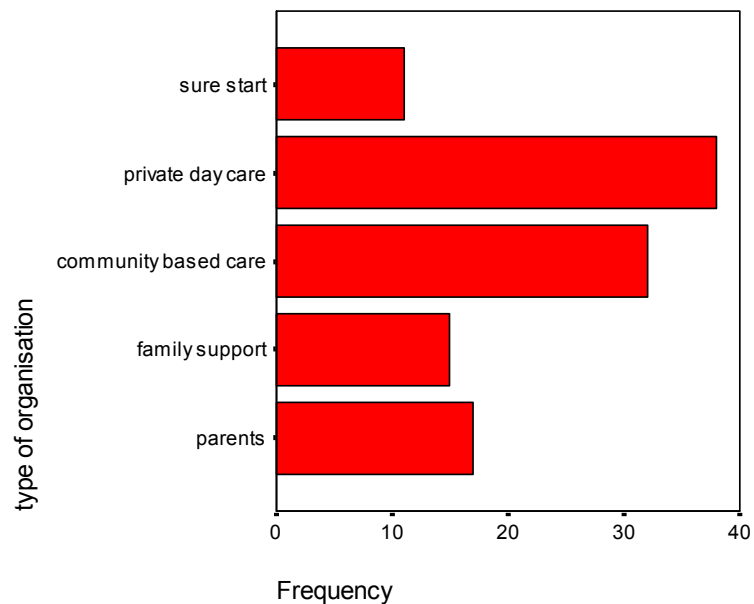
Most of those who undertook the training course were aged 19 to 44 years (27% were aged 19-24 years, 28% were aged 25-34 years and 26% were aged 35-44 years). A further 11% of participants were aged 45-54 years, 5% were aged 16-18 years and 3% were aged 55-64 years. Only three out of the 113 participants completing this first evaluation questionnaire were male.

Figure 4: Age group of participants



The participants who completed the initial evaluation form included staff from community based providers (playgroups/crèches/after school clubs), statutory child care providers, parents groups, family support services and private day care providers.

Figure 5: Type of organisation represented



## Hopes and expectations for the training programme

The participants were asked in this pre-course evaluation form about what they hoped to gain from the course. The responses are given in Table 1 below. The most popular responses were advice on best practice in dealing with children's behaviour (90%) and knowledge about methods of discipline to use with children (87%).

Table 1: What do you hope to gain from completing this course?  
(Baseline Questionnaire)

	Number	Percentage
Knowledge about methods of discipline to use with children	98	87
Advice on best practice in dealing with children's behaviours	102	90
Knowledge about alternatives to physical punishment	82	73
Skills to work with parents in developing ways to cope with children's behaviour	88	78
Knowledge to share with parents about alternatives to physical punishment	80	71
Methods of working with parents and influencing their behaviour management of their children	80	71
Up to date information on methods to manage children's behaviour	92	81
OTHER (Legislation regarding children's rights)	2	2
OTHER (Help communicating with older children)	1	1
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>113</b>	<b>100</b>

## Current behaviour management approaches

In addition to asking what the participants hoped to gain from completing the course, the questionnaire also asked what approaches they currently used at work to manage children's behaviour (including advice to parents or direct caring which they may provide).

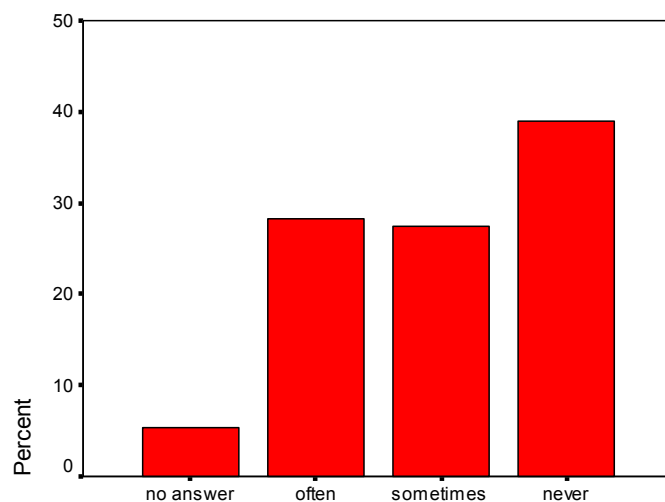
The most popular approach used by participants prior to the training was time out (38%). One third (33%) said they tried to explain to the child what he or she has done wrong or ensure that the child knew what was acceptable or unacceptable behaviour and 12% said they tried to inform or reinforce good behaviour. Fifteen percent said they supported and advised parents and provided information to parents.

Participants were also asked what they found particularly challenging in their work with children in terms of managing children’s behaviour (either in direct caring or in their work with parents). Some of the most challenging issues for participants included disobedience, tantrums or aggressive behaviour by the child (17%), changing parents attitudes to dealing with their children’s behaviour (11%), and being able to get parents and staff working together to manage behavioural problems (10%).

### **Work with parents regarding behaviour management**

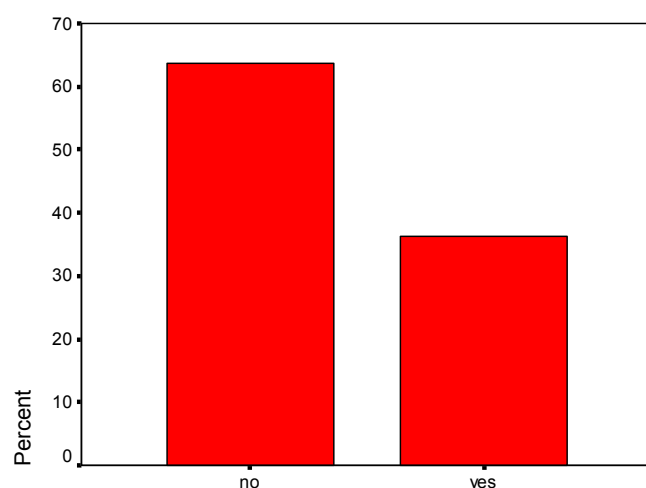
Participants were asked if they had talked to parents of the children with whom they were directly involved about behaviour management. Over a quarter (28%) said that they did so often while another quarter (27%) said they did so sometimes. Over a third (38%) said they never talked to parents about behaviour management. Those who did talk to parents mainly reported that they were advising parents about instances of behavioural problems and/or giving advice about this. This included children being harmful to others or being disruptive. Some participants informed parents about courses which were available and a few suggested strategies such as charts/rewards, routines, boundaries and consistency/reinforcement.

Figure 6: Frequency participants consulted parents about behaviour management



Participants were asked if they had talked to parents of children that they were directly involved with in their work specifically about alternatives to physical punishment. Forty one participants said that they had talked to parents (36%). Of those who had talked to parents about alternatives to physical punishment, two thirds (26 participants) had discussed the use of time out for inappropriate behaviour, two fifths (17) had discussed rewarding good behaviour and one quarter (11) had discussed withdrawal of privileges. Other participants said they had discussed using distraction, ignoring the behaviour, speaking sympathetically, discussion, grounding, and continuity as methods of managing children’s behaviour.

Figure 7: Participants consulting parents about alternatives to physical punishment



Almost two thirds (64%) of participants said that they had not talked to parents about alternatives to physical punishment (table 2 below). The main reasons given for this were a lack of opportunity, a lack of knowledge of alternatives or how best to deal with this, not being confident to discuss this with parents and believing that the parents would not welcome this. In addition, some participants thought that this was not appropriate or that it would be difficult to approach parents on this.

Table 2: Reasons why participants had not discussed alternatives to physical punishment with parents.

	Number	Percentage
Lack of opportunity	16	14
Not confident to discuss with parents	12	11
Did not think parents would welcome this	14	12
Difficult to approach parents on this	11	10
Did not think it appropriate	14	12
Lack of knowledge of alternatives/how best to deal with this	17	15
Policy not to use physical punishment	2	2
Never had a reason to	4	4
Playgroup leader would talk to parents	8	7
<i>Total had not talked to parents about alternatives to physical punishment</i>	<i>72</i>	<i>64</i>

### 3) Follow up Questionnaire

A third questionnaire was distributed to participants four months after completion of the course. This questionnaire was designed to find out what they had gained from completing the course, what they found useful and whether they had been able to apply any of the training in their work. Two thirds of those completing the pre-course questionnaire submitted a follow-up questionnaire

#### Benefits of the course

The participants were asked to indicate what they gained or developed from completing the course. All of the participants indicated they had gained some knowledge, skills or information from the course. Nine out of ten participants said they had gained advice on best practice in dealing with children's behaviours- and this is very similar to the number of participants who at the beginning of the course said that they wished to gain advice.

Table 3: What did you gain or develop from completing this course?  
(Follow-up Questionnaire)

	Number	Percentage gained/developed)	Percentage hoping to gain/develop*
Knowledge about methods of discipline to use with children	60	82	87
Advice on best practice in dealing with children's behaviours	65	89	90
Knowledge about alternatives to physical punishment	59	81	73
Skills to work with parents in developing ways to cope with children's behaviour	54	74	78
Knowledge to share with parents about alternatives to physical punishment	43	59	71
Methods of working with parents and influencing their behaviour management of their children	43	59	71
Up to date information on methods to manage children's behaviour	50	69	81
OTHER ( update on legal requirements	4	6	2
OTHER (confidence in dealing with children's behaviour)	1	1	1
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>73</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>Base 113</b>

\* from baseline questionnaire



The figures in the extreme right column of table 3 denote the proportion of participants who indicated this response when commencing the course compared to those who four months after the course said they gained this from completing the course. While in many areas the course provided similar figures in respect to what was gained from the course compared to initial hopes, two areas seemed less successful. While 71 percent of participants said that they wanted to gain knowledge to share with parents about alternatives to physical punishment and to develop methods of working with parents, 59% gained this knowledge and expertise from this course. This difference is partially explained by a high interest in this area by participants from private child care sector in the pre-course questionnaire and one session from this group not returning their follow up questionnaires thus distorting the overall picture slightly. Taking that into account there are some small differences between the before “hopes” for the course in this area and the “gains” made after the course was completed, but in all cases high rates of gaining knowledge, skills, methods and up to date information were reported by participants (59-89%).

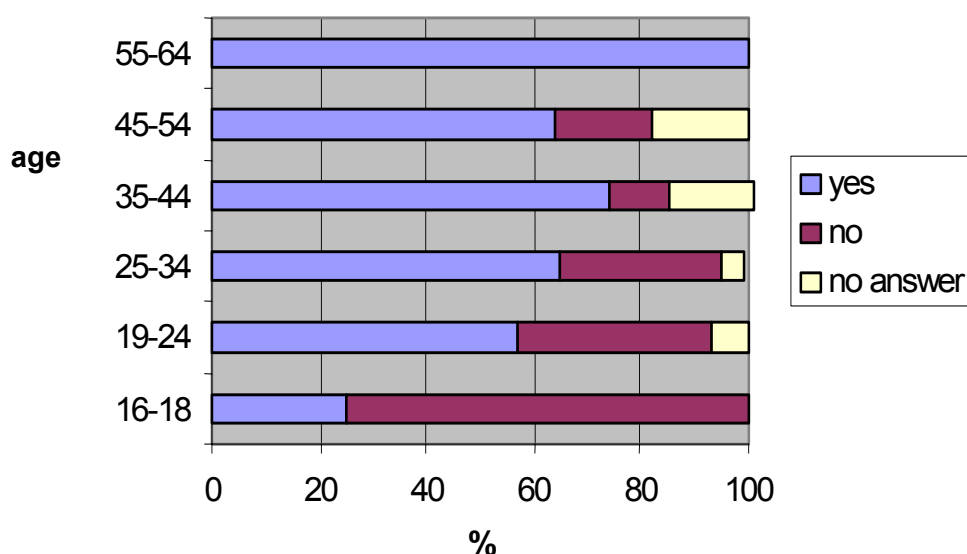
Interestingly, while older participants were less likely to say that they gained advice on best practice or acquired skills to work with parents in developing ways to cope with children’s behaviours, there was little difference by age for the development of knowledge about methods of discipline to use with children or about the development of knowledge about alternatives to physical punishment.

Remarkably, over half (55%) said that the training had changed their opinion about how children should be disciplined. The 19-24 age range were most likely to have changed their opinion (64%) along with those who worked in community based child care provision (playgroups, crèches and afterschool clubs) or were involved in a parents group. Some of the changes indicated included an insight into understanding behaviour, understanding the best type of discipline, providing a process to deal with incidents, providing techniques (time out, not shouting, encouraging and use of praise, highlighting good behaviour) and not shouting or hitting.

### **Changes to approaches used in disciplining children**

Almost two thirds of participants said they used new approaches in their work since completing the training course. Those aged under 25 were less likely to use new approaches compared to other age groups. Those working in community based child care, in family support services or parents’ groups were most likely to report using new approaches.

Figure 8: New approaches used, by age



Those who had used new approaches gave examples. Many of the new approaches cited were focused on developing methods to work with parents and sharing knowledge with parents about alternatives to physical punishment. Other approaches were focused on directly managing the child’s behaviour, with participants citing the use of techniques such as distraction, explaining to the child what you want him/her to do, using time out, consistency, ignoring bad behaviour, following sanctions through, keeping requests to child simple and short, explaining calmly to the child, no hitting, rewards for good behaviour, and setting limits and boundaries.

### Outcomes for work with children

Most participants (85%) found that the course helped them in their work with children. Some of the examples given by participants about how the course had helped them included greater confidence, better understanding of behaviour, being able to use different strategies, better knowledge base and techniques, and better able to work with children and identify their needs.

Two thirds of the participants reported that the course had helped them with managing children’s behaviour in direct caring. Interestingly, in this case, the younger participants were more likely to report that the course had helped them (79% of 19-25 year olds). Staff from private day care and community based provision were also more likely to report that the course had helped them in this area. Some of the examples of how the course had helped included:

- alternatives to the usual method of discipline
- being able to give clear advice on how to handle the situation
- better understanding of behaviour
- no longer shouting
- up to date information and techniques for managing behaviour

- aware of children’s need for boundaries, security and stable environment
- setting a more structured routine and
- following through on the consequences.

### Outcomes for work with parents

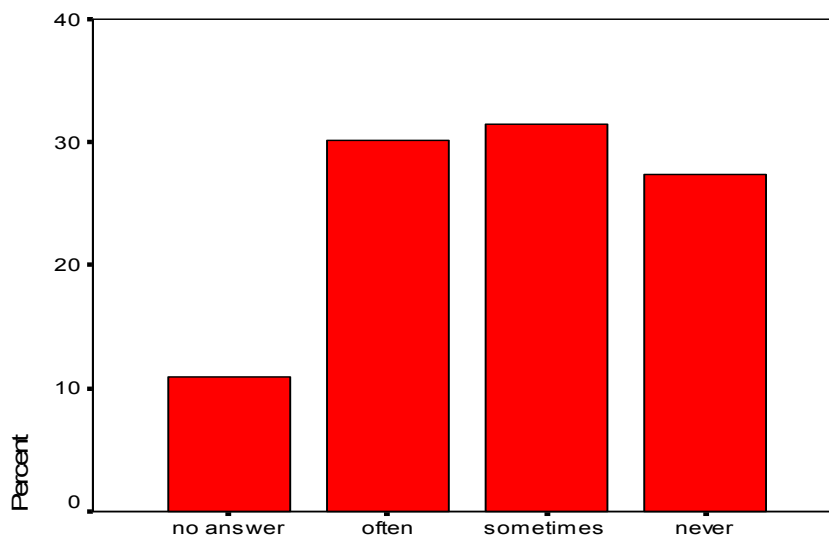
The participants were also asked in the follow-up questionnaire if the course had helped them in their work with parents. Almost two thirds said that the course had helped (64%). This was less likely to have been reported by younger workers (16-18 and 19-24 years). Younger workers may possibly have less contact with parents. However, there may also be a further development need with this age group.

Participants provided examples of how they had used what they had gained from the course in their work with parents. This included staff being more confident to give advice and guidance to parents, to be able to reassure parents and also to share concerns and doubts.

Almost three quarters of participants (71%) also stated that the course had helped them to advise parents about managing children’s behaviour. Participants reported finding this task less daunting, being more knowledgeable and having information to pass on to parents. Several participants cited being able to use handouts, being able to advise parents, and having consistency between home and nursery/day care.

Participants were also asked if they had actually talked to parents of the children they are directly involved with in their work about behaviour management since having completed the course. Almost one third (30%) said they did so often, while 32% said they sometimes talked to parents about behaviour management. Only 27% said they never did so – a significant decrease from 40% prior to participating in the training.

Figure 9: Participants consulting parents about behaviour management since completing the course



Some of the examples given by participants of how they have spoken to parents about behaviour management included discussing problems at home, informing parents about types of behaviour management, helping parents to choose methods of discipline for children, promoting positive behaviour, discussing techniques with parents (star charts, rewards, boundaries, consequences), explaining why certain strategies are used, encouraging parents to attend courses, promoting consistency and talking about relationships with their children.

### **Impact on the confidence of participants**

Participants were asked if they felt more or less confident in managing children's behaviour and in talking to parents about ways to manage children's behaviour. Eighty five percent reported that they were more confident about managing children's behaviour and 78% reported that they were more confident about talking to parents about ways to manage children's behaviour. In addition, 47% of participants have talked to parents of children they were directly involved with in their work about alternatives to physical punishment since finishing the training course. This is an improvement on the pre-course figure of 36% which indicates that the increased confidence gained during the course is helping participants to talk directly to parents about behaviour management and alternatives to physical punishment. The participants indicated some of the techniques they talked to parents about when discussing alternatives to physical punishment, including:

- time out
- star charts
- distractions
- rewards
- removal of privileges
- ignore minor behaviour
- teenagers –grounding
- acknowledge children's feelings
- consequences follow bad behaviour
- positive reinforcement
- warnings
- age appropriate behaviour
- asking children for ideas to solve problems
- praise and encouragement
- waiting until parent and child are calm, then discussing problem
- calm, low voice
- planning for improved behaviour
- boundaries
- negotiation.

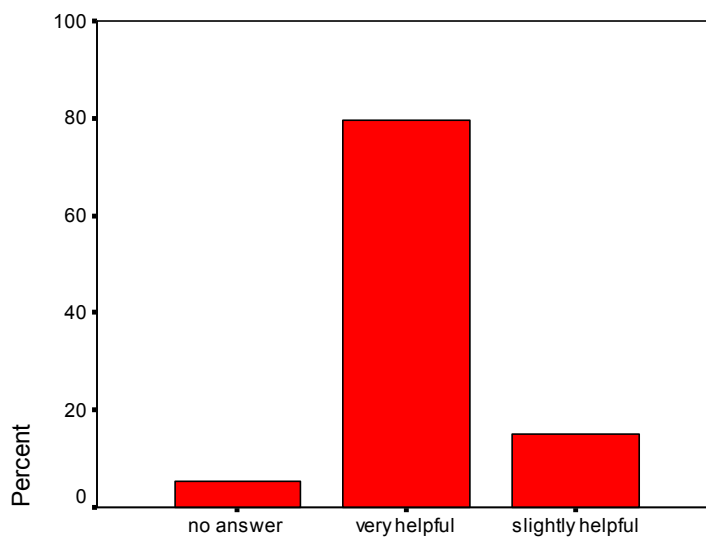
The breadth of knowledge and techniques displayed in these answers and in the examples given earlier regarding behaviour management indicate a much wider

knowledge of alternatives to physical punishment and a more balanced approach with more positive reinforcements than prior to the course.

Those participants who had not discussed alternatives to physical punishment with parents said this was due to a lack of opportunity (19 participants), difficulty approaching parents on this issue (4) and a lack of confidence (1).

Overall, a majority of participants (80%) thought the course was very helpful, while a further 15% thought it was slightly helpful. No participants said that it had not been helpful at some level.

Figure 10: Overall helpfulness of course



## **Chapter 3: Conclusions and Recommendations.**

### **Measuring the success of the project against its objectives**

The results of the evaluation clearly indicate that the project has met all five of its objectives.

#### **Objective 1: To provide training that will increase knowledge on alternatives to physical punishment**

Four months on from completing the training, all participants reported gaining knowledge and/or skills in managing children's behaviour from the course. This included:

- best practice in dealing with children's behaviours (90%)
- methods of discipline to use with children (87%)
- methods to manage children's behaviour (81%)
- alternatives to physical punishment (73%)

Moreover, almost two in three reported that they had used the new approaches in their work since completing the training course. The breadth of knowledge displayed after completing the course in terms of the range of techniques available to them indicated that they had developed a much wider knowledge of alternatives to physical punishment as well as a balanced approach using more positive reinforcement techniques.

#### **Objective 2: To influence attitudes towards how children should be disciplined.**

Remarkably, over half (55%) of participants said that the course had changed their opinion about how children should be disciplined and almost two thirds said they had used new techniques since completing the course. This new knowledge, skills and confidence gained during the course had clearly influenced attitudes and changed opinions on how children should be disciplined (objective 2).

#### **Objective 3: To enable participants to have more confidence in their ability to manage children's behaviour.**

The follow-up evaluation which participants completed four months after finishing their training course showed an increase in the confidence of the participants with regard to talking to parents about behaviour management, including alternatives to physical punishment. They are now more confident about trying to influence attitudes and provide advice on how children should be disciplined. In addition most participants, after completing the course, reported a greater confidence in their ability in managing children's behaviour (85%) and in talking to parents about behaviour management (78%).

This increase in confidence appears to be a result of the knowledge and skills that participants gained from the course and which they were now using with children directly and in discussions with parents.

**Objective 4: To improve relationships between adults and children and influence parents in managing the behaviour of their own children**

The success of achieving this objective is difficult to measure. Participants have reported increased knowledge and a wider range of non-violent techniques for managing the behaviour of the children they work with. Moreover, we know that this learning has been passed on to parents – and that more parents have been given advice on behaviour management and specifically alternatives to physical punishment. While we have no evidence from these parents about how the advice of the childcare workers has affected their practice in the home, we might deduce that they would find the information as useful as the participants who received the training directly. What strengthens this argument is the fact that a number of parents participated in the training programme themselves and found it extremely useful, reporting that it had impacted on their knowledge, skills and attitudes.

Future evaluations of projects similar to this one might consider investigating the impact of the advice provided by childcare workers on their behaviour and attitudes, and whether it improved their relationships with their children.

**Objective 5: To provide stakeholders and policy makers with relevant and up to date information**

The project has influenced practice through the provision of relevant and up to date information about alternatives to physical punishment. Information is cascading and those completing the training are sharing their knowledge and expertise with parents and are more confident now to do so. The post training evaluation questionnaire indicated a greater knowledge of a wider number of techniques for use as alternatives to physical punishment. Participants have indicated that they are now sharing this knowledge with parents as well as within working practice. It is clear from the findings of the evaluation that the course has met its objectives to provide relevant and up to date information to people working with children and to parents.

One of the reasons for conducting this evaluation of the project was to provide information in the form of recommendations to policy makers and other stakeholders on best practice in promoting positive discipline approaches among people working with children and parents.

## Recommendations on the training project

### **The training should be adapted to meet the requirements of other potential participants.**

The need for training in positive parenting and alternatives to physical punishment is not specific to those working with young children. This course should be adapted to suit the particular requirements of people working with older children and teenagers, as well as children with a diverse range of needs, including those with disabilities.

### **The course could be delivered directly to parents**

While participants on the course have been drawn largely from people working with children, a number of parents also attended and found it very useful in dealing with their own children.

### **Regular refresher training sessions should be offered.**

This would ensure that they are aware of the most up to date information and techniques available. This would also enable childcare workers to seek further advice on any difficulties they have experienced since completing the course.

### **Further research might be conducted to identify the impact of this training on the use of physical punishment in the home**

While the evidence of the evaluation shows that parents have received more advice from child care workers on alternatives to physical punishment, further research is required to identify more clearly if this has led to a drop in the use of physical punishment by parents.

## General recommendations

### **Training in positive discipline techniques should be provided to all people working directly with children**

This evaluation has highlighted a worrying gap in the confidence, knowledge and skills of childcare workers from all sectors in positive discipline techniques to deal with challenging behaviour. As a matter of urgency training in positive parenting and alternatives to physical punishment must be rolled out to all childcare workers across all sectors, and integrated into core training in the future.

### **Childcare providers must accept the responsibility to promote positive discipline approaches with parents.**

Despite reporting increased confidence in talking to parents about alternative forms of discipline to physical punishment, more than half had not talked to parents about this issue three months on from completing the course. Childcare providers must take responsibility for promoting alternatives to physical punishment with parents, instead of leaving it to individual members of staff to do this on their own initiative.



## **Appendix: Course content**

### **Section 1 – Meeting Children’s Needs**

What do children really need?  
Safeguarding and promoting a child’s welfare  
The holistic view of the developing child  
Roles of mother/father/main carer  
Who am I? How far can I go? (the child’s view)  
Styles of discipline  
Why is it hard to discipline our children?  
Creating emotional security  
Positive Parenting – issues vital to confront  
Setting boundaries  
Case studies  
Video

### **Section 2 – The Law/Law Reforms/International Perspective/Looking at Sweden**

Defining physical punishment  
Definitions of Assault  
A v UK and the European Convention of Human Rights  
R v H (UK)  
The Law in Northern Ireland  
The Northern Ireland Survey  
Sweden – 25 years on  
Sweden – the impact of the ban  
The International Perspective  
The Law in England and Wales  
The Law in Scotland  
The Law in the Republic of Ireland  
Suggested Reforms for NI  
The Present Law Relating to Physical Punishment of Children

### **Section 3 – Stress and Strains on Family Life**

Stress – learn to recognise signs  
The Physical/Emotional/Psychological Outcome of Stress  
Dealing with worry  
How to develop a relaxed attitude  
What about step-dads?  
What about weekend dads?  
Single parents  
Poverty  
Keeping healthy

#### **Section 4 – Perception, Prejudice and Myths**

Importance of self awareness, assumption, prejudice and perspective

What do you see?

The supermarket scenario (case study)

#### **Section 5 – Children’s Behaviour**

Seasons and stages

Time out

The Three D’s

Dealing with disobedience

Handling problems the assertive way

Dealing with feelings

What is discipline that works

Loving discipline is not!

The things we say that hurt

Our house

Keys to good behaviour – babies

Keys to good behaviour – toddlers

Keys to good behaviour – pre-school

Keys to good behaviour – school children

Behaviour Management Principles

Children learn what they live

#### **Section 6 – Understanding Children**

Peer Pressure

What it feels like to be hit – the child’s view

Adults get angry sometimes – the child’s view

What to do instead of hitting – the child’s view

Why it is wrong for an adult to hit a child – the child’s view