

Physical punishment is harmful to Australian children



PAFRA
Parenting & Family
Research Alliance

Joint Statement by professional bodies committed to improving child wellbeing

In 2006, the United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child ('the Committee') issued General Comment No. 8 on the right of the child to protection from corporal punishment and other cruel or degrading forms of punishment.¹ The Committee defined 'corporal' or 'physical' punishment as:

Any punishment in which physical force is used and intended to cause some degree of pain or discomfort, however light.² This included hitting (smacking, spanking, slapping, kicking, scratching, pinching, shaking, or throwing the child, pulling hair, boxing ears, and biting) with the hand or with a stick, belt, shoe, wooden spoon, or whip. The view was that corporal punishment is intrinsically degrading and, therefore, incompatible with the Convention on the Rights of the Child ('the Convention'). Moreover, other non-physical behaviour that belittles, threatens, scares, ridicules, denigrates, or humiliates the child has also been found to be incompatible with the Convention.³

This Joint Statement uses this definition of physical punishment.

Currently, 66 countries/states have eliminated/legislated against the use of physical punishment of children and a further 27 countries/states have committed to doing so. The United Nations General Assembly has targeted eliminating all forms of violence against children, including physical punishment, in its *Sustainable Development Goals* ('SDGs') for 2030.⁴ SDG Target 16.2 aims to end the abuse, exploitation, trafficking, and all forms of violence against and torture of children.

We, the signatories to this Joint Statement, are supporting the campaign Ending Physical Punishment of Australian Children, auspiced by the Parenting and Family Research Alliance (PAFRA). We declare that in light of the large body of scientific evidence which clearly states that physical punishment is harmful to the physical and mental wellbeing of our children, **Australian parents should be encouraged to use alternative forms of discipline that do not involve physical force.** (See a review of the evidence published in Australian and New Zealand Journal of Public Health [here](#)).

We call on State and Territory authorities to repeal criminal law legislation that permits physical punishment and to insert a clause into relevant civil legislation which states that physical punishment is no longer appropriate.

We acknowledge that parenting is hard. Therefore, we call on those responsible for the wellbeing of children in the medical, nursing, social work, psychological, family law, child welfare and child protection spheres and other relevant fields to ensure those raising children have access to positive parenting education and support as an alternative to physical punishment.

We aim to eliminate all forms of physical punishment from Australian parenting practices.

See all signatories to this Joint Statement on the PAFRA website. For further information, please contact a member of the Steering Committee:

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¹ UN Doc CRC/C/GC/8 *The right of the child to protection from Corporal Punishment and other cruel or degrading forms of punishment (arts 19; 28, para 2; and 37 inter alia).*

² Ibid para 11.

³ Ibid.

⁴ UN GA Res70/1 *Transforming our World, the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development*, UN Doc A/RES/70/1 (21 October 2015) <https://sdgs.un.org/goals/goal16>