

“Smacking is the only thing that works.....I get so frustrated with him sometimes. Besides, I was smacked when I was a child and it never did me any harm.”

The Great Debate

It is important that children learn how to behave and control how they act as they get older. Parents have a very important job as role models for their children in helping them to learn how to do this.

Teaching children from a young age, by setting limits and explaining reasons for those limits, helps them develop self-discipline. Smacking, which controls your child from the outside, has no long-lasting good effects. In fact, smacking usually becomes harder in order to have the same impact on your growing child. This is where the thin line between smacking and hitting can be crossed.



Have you ever smacked your child?

The answer from many parents reading this will be ‘yes’. Every parent experiences frustration with his or her child at some time. It is at these times that a parent may smack in the heat of the moment, but this is an outlet for the parent’s feelings, rather than a helpful way of training a child.

Simply because lots of people may have smacked their child does not mean that is the best way to punish your child or make sure they are good. Those who say smacking is ok have argued that it is not harmful in the long term and is the most immediate form of discipline. However, it is much more helpful, and safer, to notice and reward your child’s good behaviour, in order to encourage the behaviour you want.

Fewer parents are smacking children now. Lots of those who keep doing so do it because they are not sure what else will work.

In UK society, parents are not allowed to hurt their children, whatever their individual, cultural or religious reasons. As a result, child protection professionals will look at cases of abuse against children, so that they can understand, stop it and explain the result in it happening again. In England and Wales, The Children Act says smacking is against the law if it causes bruises, reddening of skin or mental harm.

There are a number of other ways to deal with your child’s bad behaviour. Talk to one of the organisations listed below to find one that works for you.

 **Warning Signs:**
 A child who flinches or moves away when they fear they might be hit. Smacking a child with force which (when you look back at it) you feel you shouldn't have done and feel bad about. Leaving a bruise or a mark.

 **Action:**
 If you are worried about your own or someone else’s smacking, get support from the organisations listed below. If it is someone you know, offer practical help and suggestions.

 **What to say:**
 Tell your child they have gone too far or broken family rules. Use your tone of voice and facial expressions to help them understand they have reached the limit. Explain the reasons why.

 **Prevention:**
 Make it a general rule not to smack your child. Use other ways to discipline; set clear limits and explain them, be firm and stick to rules, ignore minor bad behaviour and reward good (perhaps with a star chart)

Contacts:

Talk to your health visitor

NSPCC: 0808 800 5000 www.nspcc.org.uk

Family Lives: 0808 800 2222 www.familylives.org.uk

Barnardos: www.barnardos.org.uk