



FAMILIES FIRST

A Response to the Scottish Executive's proposals on the physical punishment of children in the criminal justice White Paper, Making Scotland Safer *February 2002*

Scottish Executive proposals on physical punishment of children place children and families at risk

On 13 December 2001, the Scottish Executive published its criminal justice White Paper, *Making Scotland Safer: Improving the Criminal Justice System*. Among the legislative proposals there are some extremely controversial measures which would criminalise many loving parents in Scotland. *Families First* is a family advocacy group committed to supporting the freedom of parents to bring up their children according to their own religious and philosophical convictions. We are deeply concerned that several of the proposals as they stand will not serve the best interests of children. We do not doubt that they are supported by many well-intentioned people, but we believe that if they were to be enacted, the consequences of these proposals would cause serious damage to many children and families in Scotland.

The role of parents

As paragraph 105 of the White Paper states, parents undoubtedly have a crucial role in the upbringing of their children, and the importance of parental example can never be understated. However, there is far more to parenting than providing a good example. In the context of the discussion of discipline, there is also a need for moral training and correction when the child behaves in an unacceptable manner.

As the White Paper states, effective discipline will be administered in a way that the child can understand. Where a child is behaving in an unacceptable way, positive discipline will effectively communicate to the child a parent's displeasure, and encourage him or her to behave in an acceptable and appropriate manner.

Many parents find that moderate physical correction has a valuable part to play within a framework of positive discipline. There has been an unfortunate tendency in much of

the debate on 'smacking' to isolate physical correction from all other aspects of parenting.

Effective communication

The impression is frequently given that parents who support the use of physical correction do not believe in the importance of parental example and are not communicating effectively with their children. However, this is to misrepresent the way in which thousands of loving parents in Scotland discipline their children.

For such parents, physical correction is merely one aspect of parenting, and it is used moderately, carefully, thoughtfully and judiciously, within the context of a warm and open relationship where the child is valued and cherished.

Tender-hearted

With younger children, physical correction, when used appropriately by a gentle and tender-hearted parent, is in itself an effective form of communication which the child is

well able to understand. With older children, it is most effectively used in conjunction with a verbal explanation and rebuke. The motive at all times is not retribution, as was suggested in last September's parliamentary debate, but rather the correction and moral training of the child.

Family privacy

The principle of the privacy of the family is vitally important. Parents must remain free to order their homes and bring up their children according to their own religious and philosophical convictions. It is for parents to decide for themselves how they will discipline their children and it is not the role of the state to impose its own view.

We are concerned that the Scottish Executive is going beyond the bounds of its legitimate remit in several of its proposals on the 'physical punishment of children'.

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REASONS FOR PROCEEDING WITH CAUTION

We recognise that the state has a role in maintaining law and order, and for punishing those who commit acts of violence in order to protect the general public. Within that general remit, the state has a role to play in the protection of children from harm, wherever it takes place, including within the home.

Physical harm caused by excessive and unreasonable corporal punishment is one of many ways in which a child may suffer harm. It strikes us as strange that the White Paper should particularly focus on *physical* punishment and yet not give attention to harm caused in other ways.

Legislating against harm

There are numerous ways in which children can be subjected to harm. Harm is not limited to physical injuries. Children may also be subjected to emotional and psychological harm by harsh words, by exposure to disturbing images, by family breakdown, and all manner of other experiences they may encounter.

To frame legislation in a prescriptive manner in this area is fraught with all kinds of difficulties. For example, research clearly demonstrates that family breakdown has a harmful effect on children, but there are obvious difficulties involved in legislating in this area.

Then there are other areas where what constitutes 'harm' is hotly disputed. For example, there is a very live debate as to whether daycare is 'harmful' to children,

what sort of television programmes and videos are damaging to children, and whether the MMR vaccine presents a health risk to young children. All these are matters on which parents take different views.

Objective evidence

In the absence of any clear, objective and observable evidence of harm, or any reason to suspect that a child may be at risk of significant harm, we believe that the state should be very wary of introducing legislation. We are concerned that in several of its proposals the Executive is losing sight of its responsibility to protect children from actual harm, and is proposing to impose a particular style of parenting on all families in Scotland.

Paragraph 108 of the White Paper states that:

In the case of A v UK, the European Court of Human Rights held that English law, which is very similar to Scottish law in this respect, did not adequately protect children from inhuman and degrading treatment.

The existing law

However, this is incorrect. The judgment of the European Court of Human Rights (ECHR) was limited to the facts of this one particular, and unusual, case. The ruling did not say that the existing UK legislation is in breach of the Convention. As the Executive's consultation document stated:

The Court's decision was based on the facts of the case before it. No general statement was made about the physical punishment of children, although A's legal representative had invited the Court to make such a statement.¹

While it may be true that 77% of respondents to the consultation document indicated support for some change in the present law, it is by no means the case that such a high percentage supports the proposals announced by the Scottish Executive. According to the Executive's own analysis of responses, support for most of the proposals received the explicit support of less than half the respondents to the consultation document.

- 47% considered it should never be considered reasonable to strike a child on the head
- 44% considered it should never be considered reasonable to shake a child
- 39% considered it should never be reasonable to use an implement to discipline a child
- Less than 5% recommended a change in the law which would make it a criminal offence to smack a child under the age of three. (This figure includes the five respondents who registered support for such a ban and the further five consultees who supported legislation against smacking children under the age of five).
- 54% were in favour of 'a ban on corporal punishment in childcare centres, by childminders and in non-publicly funded pre-school centres'.

We have made a thorough study of the consultation responses which have been published on the Executive's website and, in the following pages, wish to comment on each of the main proposals in turn.

SHAKING AND BLOWS TO THE HEAD

The consultation document suggested a clear reason why it might be appropriate to explicitly outlaw blows to the head and shaking. It stated that blows to the head might 'risk injuries to the brain, eyes and ears' and shaking might 'risk injuries to the brain'.

Certainly, there is no doubt that any form of physical punishment which causes or is likely to cause injury to the brain, eyes and ears cannot be defended as 'reasonable'. In particular, research has demonstrated the risk of injury to babies from shaking.

While we see no merit in shaking children, nor in blows to the head, there are other parts of the body which might also be considered 'out of bounds' as far as reasonable physical chastisement is concerned (e.g. placing hands around the child's neck, or the application of force to the genital area). We would suggest a shift of focus is required by the legislation. Instead of legislating against certain stated actions, we would recommend a focus on legislating against any action that causes measurable harm to the child, irrespective of how the harm is done, and irrespective of the part of the body to which it is done.

The child abuse law in the American state of Arkansas provides an excellent model in this regard. While it specifies certain actions which should not be considered moderate and reasonable (including shaking a child under the age of three and striking a child in the face), it explicitly outlaws 'any other act that is likely to cause, and which does cause, bodily harm greater than transient pain or minor temporary marks.'

We would therefore recommend that the Executive gives careful consideration to the Arkansas legislation

The Arkansas Model

The law relating to child abuse in the American state of Arkansas is worthy of emulation. It protects children, while at the same time protecting families from unnecessary state intrusion.

(4) (A) "Abuse" means any of the following acts or omissions by a parent, guardian, custodian, foster parent, or any person who is entrusted with the juvenile's care by a parent, guardian, custodian, or foster parent, including, but not limited to, an agent or employee of a public or private residential home, Child care facility, public or private school, or any person legally responsible for the juvenile's welfare:

- (i) Extreme and repeated cruelty to a juvenile; or
- (ii) Physical, psychological, or sexual abuse of any juvenile which includes, but is not limited to, intentionally, knowingly, or negligently and without justifiable cause:
 - (a) Engaging in conduct creating a substantial possibility of death, permanent or temporary disfigurement, illness, impairment of any bodily organ, or an observable and substantial impairment in the intellectual or psychological capacity of the juvenile to function within his normal range of performance and behavior with due regard to his culture;
 - (b) Any nonaccidental physical injury or mental injury; or
 - (c) Any injury which is at variance with the history given.

'Abuse' shall not include physical discipline of a Child when it is reasonable and moderate and is inflicted by a parent or guardian for purposes of restraining or correcting the Child.

The following actions are not reasonable or moderate when used to correct or restrain a Child:

- (a) Throwing, kicking, burning, biting, or cutting a Child;
- (b) Striking a Child with a closed fist;
- (c) Shaking a Child under age three (3);
- (d) Striking or other actions which result in any nonaccidental injury to a Child under the age of eighteen (18) months;
- (e) Interfering with a Child's breathing;
- (f) Threatening a Child with a deadly weapon;
- (g) Striking a Child on the face; or
- (h) Doing any other act that is likely to cause, and which does cause, bodily harm greater than transient pain or minor temporary marks.

Ark. Stat. Ann. §12-12-503 (1997)

THE USE OF IMPLEMENTS

While the Executive's consultation document supplied reasons for presenting as an option the explicit prohibition of blows to the head and shaking, no such reason was given for the option of a blanket ban on the use of any object in the discipline of children. Indeed, while 39% of consultation responses considered that it should never be reasonable to use an implement to discipline a child, not a single respondent attempted a reasoned argument against the use of an implement.

Rhetoric

A similar pattern was followed in the debate in the Scottish Parliament on 13 September 2001. One member resorted to intimidating rhetoric in support of a ban on implements:

We start with the premise that no one - that is no one - is in favour of abuse or cruelty to children. Indeed, the use of implements to punish children is something we would all agree has no place in a modern society.²

We would agree that no one is in favour of abuse and cruelty towards children, but there is no basis for the implied assumption that the careful and responsible use of a safe object constitutes cruelty and abuse.

Emotive

Another member used emotive language to voice his opposition to the use of implements. Lumping together the innocuous slipper with pool cues, electric cables, spades and tools, he declared:

People talk about the use of implements - let us just call them weapons. Why do we use these euphemisms? They are weapons. They risk serious injury to the child.³

Such language is an insult to thousands of loving, caring and responsible Scottish parents, who use a safe object to physically correct their children. To accuse such parents of using a slipper or a wooden spoon as a weapon suggests that the speaker has failed to understand why they use an implement rather than their hands and is somewhat out of touch.

There is certainly a complete failure to appreciate the responsible manner in which many loving and devoted parents use a safe object to physically correct their children, in the context of a warm parent-child relationship. To criminalise such parents would not only be a gross injustice, but it would also be harmful to the children, and represent an unnecessary use of public resources, which would be far better expended where there was real abuse.

No reason

Neither the consultation document nor the White Paper offers any reason for the proposed ban on implements. During the parliamentary debate, the former Deputy Justice Minister asserted that *'the use of implements carries the clear risk of injury to a child - indeed, that was the occasion of the case of A v UK.'*⁴

It is true that in the case of *A v UK*, the step-father-to-be used an implement, but that was not the reason why the ECHR considered the punishment 'inhuman and degrading'. It was rather the *manner* in which the implement was used ('applied with considerable force on more than one occasion') and the *injuries sustained* to the child that led to this judgment. If the man had used his bare hands to the same

extent and with the same result, the ruling would have been exactly the same.

No research

On the question of an implement carrying 'the clear risk of injury to a child', it all depends on the nature of the implement and the manner and extent to which it is used. There is no research evidence to suggest that the responsible use of a safe object carries the slightest risk of injury to a child. A wooden spoon or a slipper, applied to the top of a child's leg with a force no greater than that with which the Executive proposes to allow parents to physically correct children with their hands, carries no risk of injury at all.

Some parents within the Judaeo-Christian tradition use an implement out of religious conviction. The Bible refers to a 'rod' rather than to the hand: *'The rod and reproof give wisdom, but a child left to himself brings shame to his mother.'*⁵

There is no doubt that thousands of parents who have a clear religious and philosophical basis for using a safe object to discipline their children in a careful and responsible way would continue to act according to their convictions. Such parents should not be dismissed as 'a small but vocal minority', but treated with due respect.

Provided that they are not correcting their children in such a way as to cause or to risk causing injury, to prosecute such parents would be unjust, a poor use of public resources and, most importantly, it would be damaging to the children and families concerned.

THE IMPOSITION OF A LOWER AGE LIMIT

The White Paper proposes to outlaw the physical correction of children ‘up to and including the age of two’. In other words, it would become a criminal offence for a parent to smack a child under the age of three. Paragraph 112 goes on to add that:

‘a child cannot learn from punishment unless it understands the relationship between the bad behaviour and the punishment. Before language skills have properly developed, many children will not be able to understand why they are being punished.’

A child’s understanding

There is a clear implication that children below the age of three would not be able to understand why they had been smacked. This is simply untrue. Every parent knows that children young children are able to understand far more than they can articulate. A child’s understanding of simple vocabulary and expressions of pleasure, displeasure, happiness and sadness are not dependent on language skills being ‘properly developed’.

If it were true that a child could not understand a smack before the age of three, the same logic would require us to say that a child could not understand any alternative method of discipline before that age either. The notion set forth in the White Paper is quite frankly ludicrous. Not only would you have to outlaw smacking, but to be consistent you would have to outlaw any form of discipline before the age of three on the basis that the child would not understand the relationship between his/her behaviour and the parent’s response. The logical conclusion of the Executive’s position is to offer

parents a counsel of despair during some of the most formative years of the child’s life.

Better early than late

Every parent knows that it is during the toddler years that children can test the boundaries, display a defiant attitude, and throw temper tantrums. It is vitally important to begin their moral training while they are still young. Physical correction is particularly valuable as a way of setting boundaries for toddlers and impressing upon them that certain behaviour is unacceptable.

There is no question that toddlers who understand the meaning of the word ‘No’ (and they do!) will also understand why they are smacked if they persist in doing what they have been told not to do. In fact, it is often far easier for young children to understand the relationship between their behaviour and a smack than it is for them to understand being scolded, sent to their room, or having a privilege withdrawn.

Immediacy

There is something about the immediacy of a physical reprimand, accompanied by a few simple, tender words of rebuke that makes physical correction a particularly appropriate and valuable disciplinary tool in the toddler years. A well-timed smack can prevent a little disobedience from growing into a fully-fledged tantrum, or a little spitefulness developing into a major battle zone.

In fact, the Executive’s proposals may well prove counterproductive. Parents who refrain from smacking their children until the age of three may well find themselves having to smack their children far more when

they reach that magic age than they might otherwise have done had they started sooner.

If the first part of paragraph 112 demonstrates a lack of knowledge and understanding of children, the second part provides no basis for legal reform. The Executive justifies imposing a lower age limit on the ground that consultation responses showed that *‘many people would regard punishment to be wrong or ineffective for children below a certain age’*.

Not ‘many people’

In fact, according to the Executive’s analysis of consultation responses, only five respondents proposed a ban on smacking children under the age of three. But even had that figure been considerably higher, laws affecting the dynamics of relationships within the family simply cannot be made on the basis of the opinions of ‘many people’.

Opinions on all aspects of bringing up children are very varied. And the character of one child will differ very much from that of another. It is not the role of the state to legislate for one parenting style over another and to impose a uniform approach to childrearing on every family by force of law. If some parents believe it is ‘wrong or ineffective’ to smack a child under a certain age, that view should be respected. Likewise, if other parents take a different view, they too should be respected and not treated as criminals.

The criminal law should be reserved to deal with those who are causing their children harm. It should not intervene in well-ordered, loving homes, where children are well cared-for.

SMACKING BY CHILDMINDERS

The Scottish Executive's news release announcing the publication of the White Paper stated that the purpose of legal reform in this area was to 'protect children from excessive physical punishment'.

We have already demonstrated that there is nothing intrinsically 'excessive' about physically correcting a child under the age of three. Neither is there anything necessarily 'excessive' about the use of a safe object in the physical correction of a child. Both these proposals are therefore quite unnecessary in order to attain to the Executive's stated objective.

Insult to parents

The same applies to the proposal found in paragraph 116 of the White Paper which states:

'Finally, we will ban smacking in all regulated childcare including by childminders.'

This proposal is an insult to parents who, for whatever reason, find it necessary to employ a trusted childminder to care for their child. It is quite inappropriate for the state to come between a parent and a childminder and dictate what a parent may or may not agree with regard to the reasonable discipline of a child.

Inconsistent

The only argument offered in support of the proposal is that of 'consistency':

'Smacking is already banned in publicly funded nurseries and extending the ban to all regulated childcare will give clarity and consistency.'

But consistency for whom? Certainly not for the child, who may receive a disciplinary smack from his mother when he misbehaves in a certain way at 8 o'clock in the morning before he is taken to his childminder, but not at 10 o'clock when he does the same thing at the childminder's home. On this point, the Executive appears to have lost sight of the principle that 'the best interests of the child are paramount'.

To the child concerned, it is a matter of no relevance at all that his friend at the nursery down the road cannot be smacked by the nursery nurse, whereas he can be smacked by his childminder when he misbehaves. That kind of 'consistency' is of no interest to him at all. The only consistency he knows is the continuity of care provided by his mother and the childminder.

Individually tailored

The reason why many parents choose to employ a childminder rather than place their child in some form of group daycare is precisely because the care given can be tailored to meet the individual needs and requirements of the child. Children are not peas in a pod. 'Consistency' does not mean treating each child in exactly the same way.

In fact, the Executive's own position is inconsistent with itself, because while it would forbid a childminder smacking a minded child, the White Paper goes out of its way to say:

'Carers in the home would still be permitted to smack if they had specific permission from the parents.'

Why can that same permission not be extended to childminders, to give

consistency in the approach to discipline a child receives? Such a position would be far more consistent for both parents and children.

Undermining parents

The only other explanation given for the Executive's proposal to make it a criminal offence for a childminder to smack a child is that:

'There was strong support during the consultation for this ban, especially from childcare providers.'

But the consultation question sandwiched childminders between childcare centres and non-publicly funded pre-school centres. Even so, only just over a half (54%) registered their support for such a ban.

However, other more recent polls specifically relating to childminding have demonstrated overwhelming support for leaving decisions about child discipline to the discretion of parents.

Imposition

But, in any case, this is not a matter to be decided by majority vote. Even if the majority of childcare workers *do* support a ban on smacking by childminders, it is not the role of the state to impose the will of the majority upon the minority in private arrangements that are made by a parent for the personalised care of a child.

Childminders who are opposed to smacking a minded child do not have to do so. Like so many other aspects of child care, it is a matter to be discussed and agreed by a parent and childminder.

TOWARDS A MORE POSITIVE APPROACH

A careful consideration of the White Paper, read in conjunction with the parliamentary debate of 13 September, reveals that the Scottish Executive has failed to understand both how and why many parents use physical correction as part of the discipline of their children.

Paragraph 117 of the White Paper states:

'The aim of our policy is to reduce the level of violence in society, and it is well known that children learn their habits in later life by example. Physical punishment has its uses, but it may also teach a child that force is permissible to get your own way.'

No one would dispute that this is a laudable aim. Everyone longs to see a reduction in the levels of violence in society, but we believe that the Executive is misguided in believing that its proposed legislation would contribute to this end.

False assumptions

The policy rests on an assumption that equates physical correction with violence and which implies that physical correction contributes to violence in society. Neither of these assumptions has any firm basis. In addition, there is no evidence to suggest that a ban would reduce the levels of violence in society. In fact, in Sweden, where all physical correction was outlawed in 1979, statistics demonstrate that young people brought up since the ban on smacking are increasingly likely to be perpetrators of violent assaults as they grow up.⁶

On 23 January 2002, the Scottish Executive published figures which showed a total of 4,501 incidents of violence against education authority staff in Scotland during 2000/01 - a 50% increase over the previous

year. Whether the increase is largely accounted for by improved reporting procedures and greater awareness of the issues, as the Executive suggests, or whether the situation is worsening, as many teachers believe, violence is clearly a major problem in our schools. And there is no evidence to suggest that the ban on physical punishment in state schools has done anything to reduce the problem.

Rising violence

There are clearly other factors at work that need to be addressed, and the kind of measures the Scottish Executive is proposing will do nothing to deal with the problem. In fact, they are more likely to have the opposite effect and contribute to a rise in violence if parents are afraid to discipline their children in an effective manner.

There is simply no evidence for the view that reasonable physical correction 'teaches a child that force is permissible to get your own way'.

Positive discipline is not a matter of parents 'getting their own way'. It is rather a matter of setting boundaries, teaching children how to behave and correcting them when they are defiant and disobedient. Reasonable physical correction in the context of a loving family no more teaches children to use physical force than a nation's judicial system teaches people to lock up anyone who offends them.

The negative view of physical correction which is reflected in the White Paper is not at all warranted by the facts.

During the parliamentary debate, the former Deputy Justice Minister expressed the view that *'the proposals will send out a signal to*

*Scotland's children that they are valued.'*⁷

Valuing children

We believe, however, that the signal they send out to children is that the Scottish Executive thinks it knows better than their Mum and Dad, and that their parents cannot be trusted to discipline them in a reasonable way.

Many parents use physical correction precisely because they value their children - and that includes the discipline of toddlers, the responsible use of a safe object, and the delegation of authority to a trusted childminder. Physical correction, properly used, is not 'the easy way out' it is often presented as. It takes effort, wisdom and self-control. It is hard work, and many parents simply care for their children too much to withhold from them the discipline that they need.

The Bible is frequently misquoted and maligned in this debate, but it is striking that it never refers to physical correction without emphasising that it is a merciful provision which should be used as an expression of love for the child and for a positive purpose.

Notes

¹ *The Physical Punishment of Children in Scotland: A Consultation*, The Scottish Executive Justice Department, February 2000, para 4.6

² Scottish Parliament (debates), 13 September 2001 col 2503

³ *ibid*, col 2511

⁴ *ibid*, col 2502

⁵ Proverbs 29:15

⁶ Larzelere, RE *Sweden: data does not support success claims*, Families First, Issue 2, Autumn 2001

⁷ Scottish Parliament, *op cit*, col 2503

⁸ *ibid*, col 2499

⁹ *ibid*, col 2501

THINKING THROUGH THE CONSEQUENCES

In paragraph 114 of the White Paper, the Scottish Executive expresses the view that its proposals *'will provide welcome clarification for parents and others while safeguarding children from actions that could risk serious injury, such as shaking.'*

We agree that shaking a young child can cause serious physical injury and that this message needs to be more clearly communicated. However, the same cannot be said for the moderate and reasonable physical correction of a toddler, the careful and responsible use of a safe object, or smacking by a childminder with parental consent.

Not welcome

All in all, therefore, the Executive's proposals are not welcome at all. Indeed, it is difficult to reconcile the proposals with some of the more general statements which have been made by Ministers.

In introducing the parliamentary debate, the Deputy Justice Minister stated:

*'Parents who use physical punishment as part of a principled and caring system of family discipline have nothing to fear from our proposals.'*⁸

That is certainly a laudable aim when framing any legislation. The law should not be framed in such a way that it will criminalise loving, caring, responsible parents, who are persuaded of the positive value of moderate and reasonable physical correction. However, as currently drafted, the Executive's proposals will do precisely that. They will criminalise parents who smack a child under the age of three, they

will criminalise parents who use a safe object to physically correct their children, and they will criminalise a childminder who uses a reasonable physical sanction on a minded child with the consent of the child's parents. Such parents and childminders have everything to fear from the current proposals.

Evil intent

Later in the debate, the Deputy Justice Minister stated that any legislation following the Executive's proposals should *'require evil intent to be demonstrated'*.⁹

Once again, there is some wisdom in this statement, but this requirement is absent from the White Paper. It is nothing short of outrageous to suggest that those parents who would become criminals under the proposals are acting with 'evil intent'. There are many thousands of parents in Scotland who smack their children under the age of three without evil intent, just as there are many parents in Scotland who physically correct their children with a safe object without a shadow of evil intent and many childminders who smack a minded child with parental consent without evil intent.

No option

It is a simple fact that many upright, law-abiding, responsible Scottish parents would find themselves with no option but to disregard these proposals if they were to pass into law. They would not be prepared to allow a bad law to get in the way of the proper care of their children.

The Executive must therefore give careful consideration to what action should be taken against such parents if they were to come to the attention of the authorities. What action does

the Executive consider that the authorities should take if a parent smacks a toddler or disciplines a child with a wooden spoon, or if a childminder had smacked a minded child with the prior consent of the child's parents?

If 'offending parents' were to be sent on a parenting course, as is recommended by some, what would happen if, at the end of the course, they were still persuaded of the value of physical correction and felt that in certain circumstances it was the kindest and most merciful means of discipline for a toddler? Or what would happen to the parent who was not prepared to lay a hand on his or her child but, for religious reasons, used a safe object instead?

Damage to families

If the child is not suffering any harm, it is difficult to see in whose interest it would be for the authorities to intervene. It would be unnecessarily disruptive, not to mention a gross injustice. Yet that is a very real possibility under the current proposals.

Not only would any case conference, care proceedings or court hearings be completely unnecessary and unwarranted, but they could do serious damage to the family and would not be in the best interests of the child.

A further adverse consequence of the proposals as they currently stand is that already over-stretched social services resources will spend valuable time investigating reports of physical correction in stable, secure, loving homes, when their time would be far better spent supporting genuinely abused children and their parents.

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