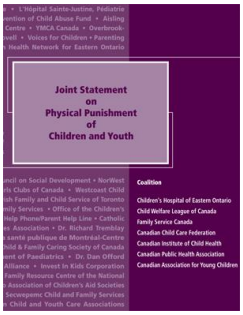
Joint Statement on Physical Punishment of Children and Youth



Physical Punishment of Children: Fact Sheet

"On the basis of the clear and compelling evidence—that the physical punishment of children and youth plays no useful role in their upbringing and poses only risks to their development—parents should be strongly encouraged to develop alternative and positive approaches to discipline."
- *Joint Statement on Physical Punishment of Children and Youth*

Physical punishment is the most common form of violence experienced by children. It is linked to broad and enduring personal and societal harm.

Physical punishment is consistently linked to bodily injury, impaired relationships with parents, weaker internalization of moral values, development of antisocial attitudes and aggressive behaviour, bullying, dating violence, disrupted brain development, and poorer cognitive development and school achievement. It is linked to adolescent and adult mental health problems and to alcohol and drug abuse. For most parents who use physical punishment, these outcomes are unintended, unforeseen, and decidedly unwelcome.

Not only is physical punishment linked to lifelong harm of children who experience it, but it is often transmitted across generations, along with its negative outcomes. The profound generational impact of the violence experienced by thousands of Indigenous children placed in residential schools is a powerful demonstration of this cycle of harm. So extensive and enduring is the harm that the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada has called for the law permitting physical punishment of children to be removed from the *Criminal Code*.

The broader community is burdened by the health, social and economic consequences of physical punishment. Children who experience it are at risk for harming others as they encounter peers, attend school, play sports, move into workplaces, date, partner, and become parents in turn.

Physical punishment is a violation of children's human rights. The United Nations *Convention on the Rights of the Child*—ratified by Canada and every other country in the world but one—obligates countries to protect children from all forms of violence. To date, 65 countries have prohibited physical punishment in law and 27 more have committed to doing so. Canada has not yet made such a commitment.

Research on its consequences, growing recognition of children's rights, media attention, and parenting education have reduced support in Canada for physical punishment. Support for and use of physical punishment decline more steeply in countries that prohibit it and undertake universal public education.

As support for physical punishment has declined, greater attention has been paid to the value of positive discipline, which respects children's rights and is demonstrably effective for raising healthy and respectful children.

Resources for further study

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We Know Enough Now To Stop Hitting Our Children

Positive Discipline in Everyday Parenting

Global Initiative to End All Corporal Punishment of Children

January 1, 2023