



Llywodraeth Cymru
Welsh Government

Ending Physical Punishment in Wales

Information for Parents

21 March 2022 is a historic moment for children and their rights in Wales. From this day on, physically punishing children will be **illegal** in Wales. We want to help protect children and their rights, to give them the best start in life. As a parent, here's what you need to know about the change in law.

What is physical punishment?

There are lots of types of physical punishment. It can mean smacking, hitting, slapping and shaking. But there are other types too. It isn't possible to give a set list of what makes up physical punishment because it can be anything where a child is punished using physical force. Research suggests that any type of physical punishment could be harmful to children.

What does the change in law mean?

- All physical punishment will be illegal in Wales.
- It will give children the same protection from assault as adults.
- It will make the law clearer - easier for children, parents, professionals and the public to understand.

What happens if I physically punish my child from 21 March 2022?

Anyone who physically punishes a child:

- will be breaking the law
- risks being arrested or charged with assault
- may get a criminal record, which is the same for any criminal offence.

Information, advice and support is available for anyone who needs it, to help them find positive ways to manage children's behaviour and to help avoid such a situation ever happening.

Does it mean I can't discipline my child anymore?

No. Every child needs discipline; it is an essential part of good parenting. However, there is a big difference between discipline and physical punishment.

Discipline is about providing a child with boundaries, guidance and support so they learn appropriate behaviour. The change in law would not affect a parent's ability to do this.

Physical punishment is not a necessary part of disciplining children.

It may look like it works because children often stop what they're doing when they get a smack for example.

But physical punishment of children is not effective in improving children's behaviour and it doesn't help children learn about self-control or appropriate behaviour.

Physical punishment can:

- hurt a child
- make a child feel fear, anger, sadness and confusion
- give children the message that violence is ok and is an appropriate response to strong feelings
- be associated with negative outcomes for children.

For more information on ending physical punishment in Wales go to:
gov.wales/EndPhysicalPunishment

For positive parenting tips and information go to: *Parenting. Give it time:*
gov.wales/giveittime

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Ending Physical
Punishment



Will it change every day parenting?

Absolutely not! Parents cuddle, brush hair, brush teeth, play 'rough and tumble', and lift children into car seats on a daily basis.

Sometimes it's tricky getting a child dressed and you have to do so against their will, on occasion, to keep them warm, to enable them to go outside and so on.

The change in law does not prevent any of these activities – it only seeks to end physical punishment.

And to be clear, any physical interventions to keep children safe from harm is **not physical punishment**.

Holding back a child from running into a road or restraining a child to keep them from injuring themselves or others, or stopping them putting their hand into a fire or onto a hot surface is good parenting, not punishment.

However, after you have seen your child do something dangerous if you also react by smacking your child, you are physically punishing them and this would not be acceptable under the law.

Where can I get advice and support?

- **Parenting. Give it time** offers positive parenting practical hints, tips and expert advice to encourage good behaviour from children and alternatives to physical punishment. Their **parenting support page** offers links to further support and helplines.
- Universal parenting support and advice is provided by midwives, health visitors, GPs and **Family Information Services**.
- Early help programmes such as **Flying Start** (if you live in a Flying Start area) and **Families First**.



If I can't use physical punishment, how can I deal with my child's unwanted behaviour?

There are many ways to discipline a child without using physical punishment.

- Sometimes just distracting a young child in a challenging situation is enough to reduce problem behaviour.
- With children over 3 years old you can use a consequence instead of physical punishment, such as removing a favourite toy or activity for a short time.
- For older children and teenagers, knowing what would have the biggest impact is important, such as removing access to electronics, spending time with their friends or loss of pocket money for a set period of time.
- By learning to recognise and manage our own feelings and emotions, it may mean that we can calm situations before they escalate. For example, by staying calm, taking a few deep breaths or even walking away – you give your child a great example of how to behave.

Positive parenting

top tips

- Give genuine praise for positive (good) behaviour.
- Have clear family rules suitable for your child's age and ability.
- Plan ahead for times where children tend to behave in challenging ways (e.g. take a snack or toy on shopping trips).
- Try and think about what's going on under the surface of tricky behaviours – is your child Hungry, Angry, Lonely or Tired (HALT)?
- Connect a feeling to the behaviour e.g. *'I think you are throwing the toys because you are cross, but we don't hurt people.'*
- Develop a routine that works for your family.
- Model the behaviour you want to see - a child won't understand that hitting or shouting is not allowed if that is what they see adults do.

Visit **Parenting. Give it time** for more information.

**Times have changed. Attitudes have changed.
There is no place for physical punishment in a modern Wales.**