The impact of Physical Punishment on your child and family



Harrow Council is committed to working with families and their communities to educate, support protect and ensure children and young people achieve their full potential.

All parents can come under pressure or stress from time to time, and it can even lead them to lose their temper. Physical punishment is however never an effective way to discipline your children.

"Corporal" or "physical" punishment is any punishment in which physical force is used and intended to cause some degree of pain or discomfort, however light. Most involves hitting ("smacking", "slapping", "spanking") children, with the hand or with an implement - a whip, stick, belt, shoe, wooden spoon, etc. But it can also involve, for example, kicking, shaking or throwing children, scratching, pinching, biting, pulling hair or boxing ears, forcing children to stay in uncomfortable positions, burning, scalding or forced ingestion (Committee on the Rights of the Child, 2006). Allowing another adult to physically chastise your child can also amount to an offence.

The 5 key impacts on your child:

Physical

- Direct physical harm: cuts, bruises, reddening of the skin, scratches, swelling, broken bones.

Cognitive

- Hitting your child to get them to do homework can lead to them associating homework with anxiety and pain. This could act as a barrier to their learning.
- Lack of concentration in school.
- Your children's education can suffer limiting their aspirations and options for the future.

Harrow COUNCIL LONDON

Emotional

- Mental harm: anxiety, isolation, damage to self-esteem, reduced confidence, depression and self-harming behaviour.
- Difficulty in expressing and controlling emotions and understanding those of others.
- Children may interpret hitting as a sign that you do not love them. Physical punishment can cause your child to resent you later in life, which could affect your longer-term relationship and family dynamics.

Behavioural

- An acceptance that violence is ok: if children are raised in an environment where violence is used, they may come to think it is ok.
- If you smack, children may hit back and may fear, but not respect you.
- Increased aggression in children: fighting with siblings and friends, dealing with conflict using violence, attention seeking behaviour.
- Children who have been hit may feel that they have paid for their misbehaviour and are free to misbehave again. It frees the child from feelings of remorse which are needed to prevent future misbehaviour.

Criminality

- Physical punishment can lead to poor moral internalisation and breed hostility toward authority figures.
- Increased risk of anti-social behaviour. This can lead to your child getting a criminal record, which could then affect their entire future.
- Increased violence and criminal behaviour in adulthood including domestic abuse.

Harrow COUNCIL LONDON

Physical Punishment is using any physical force to punish your child for wrongdoing or to make them do what you want them to (i.e. homework).

There is no justification for smacking or physically punishing children. Strict punishments always make matters worse.

There are many other parenting strategies that you can use to discipline your child. Positive strategies can also strengthen the relationship with your child in the short and long term.



Physically chastising your child, regardless of whether an injury is caused or not, is an offence. You could be subject to a police interview, arrested and detained at a police station before a decision is made to caution or charge you. Should you be convicted at Court, this could result in a fine, community service or a prison sentence. You would then subsequently have a criminal record that could have implications or your employment and travel restrictions.

Common assault (*Criminal Justice Act 1988)* - Maximum sentence 6 months.

Assault Occasioning Actual Bodily Harm (*Offences Against the Person Act 1961)* – Five years' imprisonment.

Wounding or Inflicting Grievous bodily Harm (*Offences Against the Person Act 1861)* – Five years' imprisonment.



There is a lot help available to parents in Harrow:

1) For advice and support on parenting you can initially speak to your child's school or local Children's Centre.
2) To access parenting support including parenting programme and drop-in sessions, please contact our Early Intervention Service via our MASH team on 020 8901 2690.
3) If you are concerned that a child is at risk of significant harm, you MUST contact Harrow Children's Services on 0208 901 2690 (out of hours: 0208 424 0999).

