

Patron : Prof. Ian Grenville Cross
GBS, SC

贊助人 : 江樂士教授
GBS, SC



107-108, G/F., Wai Yuen House, Chuk Yuen (North) Estate,
Wong Tai Sin, Kowloon, Hong Kong.
香港九龍黃大仙竹園北邨蕙園樓地下 107-108 號
Tel: (852) 2351 6060 Hotline: (852) 2755 1122 Fax: (852) 2752 8483
Home Page: <http://www.aca.org.hk> E-mail: aca@aca.org.hk

Chairperson : Dr. Patrick Cheung
BBS

主席 : 張志雄醫生
BBS

Director : Ms. Donna Wong
總幹事 : 黃翠玲女士

Views on International SpankOut Day – End Corporal Punishment of Children

29/4/2023

Established in 1979, Against Child Abuse (ACA) has been committed to eliminating all forms of child abuse in Hong Kong and promoting a caring and non-violent environment for the optimal growth and development of children.

According to the Child Protection Registry of the Social Welfare Department, there were a total of 1,439 newly registered child protection cases in 2022, which is a record high. Among them, physical harm/abuse ranked the highest rate, accounting for 45% of the total. Most of the physical harm/abuse cases involve corporal punishment, and they are even caused by corporal punishment accumulated over time. The situation is worrying.

“No Spank • More Love in Home” Carnival

Every April 30th is the International SpankOut Day, which aims at arousing society’s attention to ending corporal punishment of children and promoting non-violent parenting methods. ACA has responded to the SpankOut Day by carrying out community education activities and advocacy every year since 2005. Today, 29 April, we held the “No Spank • More Love in Home” Carnival at Chuk Yuen (North) Estate, Wong Tai Sin to calling for an end to corporal punishment of children, and encouraging parents to adopt positive discipline methods and listen to children’s needs patiently so that children can grow healthily and happily in a safe, caring and non-violent environment. The content of the carnival included ceremony and children’s talent performances, game booths, parent-child interactive games and panel exhibition, etc.

Corporal punishment brings scourge with far-reaching consequences

Corporal punishment of children does not help discipline, on the contrary, it may bring scourge, causing damage to children’s physical and mental health, and even death. Numerous studies in the past have proved that corporal punishment is harmful to children, affecting their brain development, and inducing unsociable, uncontrollable, violent, anti-social and aggressive behaviour. Even mild corporal punishment of children by parents or caregivers can easily escalate unwittingly to violent levels over time. Children regard their parents as role models, and parents’ behavior and ways of problem solving can have a profound impact on them. Some researches show that children who have been abused and beaten are more likely to use violence to release stress and solve problems, and are more

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likely to become abusers when they grow up, which will bring scourge to the next generation.

Current legislation prohibiting corporal punishment of children

In 1976, the government enacted “Child Care Service Regulations” stating that no person shall administer corporal punishment to a child in child care centres. Flogging on criminals as a form of corporal punishment was banned in Hong Kong penal system in 1990. In September 1991, the government amended “Education Regulations” to ban corporal punishment on students in schools. However, corporal punishment of children for discipline reasons is still common in home, and there is no clear legislation prohibiting it until now.

In view of the fact that many child abuse cases start with corporal punishment, and the severity often escalates unconsciously and becomes physical abuse. Therefore, it is an urgent need to enact a comprehensive ban on corporal punishment of children.

Corporal punishment of children is a violent act that violates the spirit of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child. The harm arising from corporal punishment to children is not limited to physical pain, but also leaves hidden scars on the mind. It is the joint responsibility of the government, society and families to protect the best interests of children. ACA has the following recommendations:

Legislation to total ban corporal punishment of children

Law is the baseline for protecting children. Children should enjoy basic human rights and grow up in an environment free of fear and violence. ACA urges the government to legislate a comprehensive ban on corporal punishment, including the family level. Legislation not only sets a bottom line of zero tolerance for violence, but also has an educational effect, making the public recognize the importance that society places on children and families. At present, there are 65 countries or states around the world that have enacted legislation to completely prohibit corporal punishment of children, and we hope that Hong Kong can also become one of them. Prohibition of all corporal punishment does not equal to let all abusive parents get into jail, but to deliver the message that corporal punishment is a socially unacceptable method of disciplining children. Compulsory parent education and counseling services for parents can be one of the approaches.

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Promote Positive Parenting

In the process of child growth and development, parents and caregivers need to give them proper nurture and discipline, but must use positive and non-violent methods. If parents and caregivers are equipped with parenting knowledge and skills early, it is believed that corporal punishment or child abuse incidents can be effectively reduced. ACA recommends that the Government allocates more resources to promote non-violent discipline and strengthen parent education in the community, so as to equip parents and caregivers with the ability of positive discipline, and provide appropriate assistance to families at risk as soon as possible.

Strengthen support for families with children with special educational needs

The Legislative Council's new issue of "Statistical Highlights" pointed out that the number of students with special educational needs (SEN) in Hong Kong has more than doubled in ten years, from 28,630 in the 2011/12 school year to 58,890 in the 2021/22 school year. Parents of children with special educational needs face greater stress in caring and disciplining their children, and are more prone to anxiety and emotional distress. According to the 2021 statistical report of the Child Protection Registry of the Social Welfare Department, out of the 1,367 newly registered child protection cases, 32% of the abused children were reported to have one or more types of disabilities, including special educational needs. We recommend the government to provide more appropriate resources and assistance for children with special educational needs and their families, especially in terms of mental health.

We hope that every day is "SpankOut Day", let's create a safe, harmonious and caring society for children!

Against Child Abuse