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International SpankOut Day–End Corporal Punishment of Children
Advocate positive parenting to build a harmonious family
(27/4/2024)

Established in 1979 and celebrating its 45th anniversary, Against Child Abuse (ACA) has been shouldering the roles of child abuse prevention, child protection, counselling and treatment, and advocacy. We are committed to eliminating all forms of child abuse in Hong Kong and promoting a caring and non-violent environment.

“Positive Parenting • No Spank” Carnival 2024

Every 30th April is the International SpankOut Day, which aims at arousing society’s attention to ending corporal punishment of children and promoting non-violent parenting methods. Since 2005, ACA has responded to the SpankOut Day by carrying out community education activities and advocacy every year. Today, 27th April, we held the “Positive Parenting • No Spank” Carnival at Chuk Yuen (North) Estate, Wong Tai Sin. Through ceremony, children’s talent performances, game booths, parent-child interactive games and panel exhibition, we call for an end to corporal punishment of children, and encourage parents to adopt positive discipline methods so as to build a safe, harmonious and caring environment.

Corporal punishment has far-reaching effects. Many benefits to ending corporal punishment and positive parenting

Over the past few decades, many scientific researches have shown that corporal punishment of children does not help discipline, and it will bring profound effects on children’s physical, brain, psychological and social development, and emphasized the importance of establishing a good parent-child relationship and adopting positive parenting methods. Children who are exposed to long-term corporal punishment are more likely to develop learning, emotional, behavioral and social problems, and any form of corporal punishment easily escalates to child abuse over time.

In her speech at the 34th San Diego International Conference on Child and Family Maltreatment in January 2019, Professor of Pediatrics, Antoinette Laskey pointed out that there was no evidence to support corporal punishment as a positive way to improve children’s behaviors. On the contrary, corporal punishment easily escalates to a level of violence, resulting in physical injury, thus destroying parent-child relationships and making future discipline even more difficult. She also expressed that increasing researches have provided evidence to prove that

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corporal punishment is not only ineffective, but is harmful to children, affecting their brain development, promoting violence, anti-social and aggressive behavior.

We call on parents and caregivers to use positive parenting methods to establish a good parent-child relationship. Positive parenting emphasizes respect and understanding, and helps children develop good behavior and social skills through communication, guidance, encouragement and appreciation. This parenting style not only promotes children's physical and mental health, but also helps them build their self-esteem and self-confidence.

ACA Questionnaire Survey on “Views on Corporal Punishment of Children”

Following up with the questionnaire survey on children's and parents' experience of corporal punishment conducted from February to April 2019, ACA conducted a questionnaire survey from November 2023 to February 2024 among random samples of children and parents in Hong Kong on their views on corporal punishment. A total of 605 children and 717 parents participated. Comparing with the 2019 survey results, it shows that there is a decreasing trend in the use of corporal punishment by parents on their children; parents' childhood experience of corporal punishment affects intergenerational discipline models; there is an upward trend of parents and children who believe that corporal punishment is useless, has no long-term effect, and will have negative impacts; most parents and children believe that good two-way communication, listening to children's voices and learning positive discipline can replace corporal punishment; more than 70% of parents agree to pass legislation to completely ban corporal punishment of children (including at home).

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 centers. 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.

Corporal punishment of children is a violent act. Many child abuse cases start with corporal punishment, and the severity often escalates unconsciously and becomes physical abuse. To fulfill the spirit of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, ACA has the following recommendations:

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1. Legislation to total ban corporal punishment of 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 total 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 aware 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 (see the attachment for details), and we hope that Hong Kong can also become one of them. Prohibition of all corporal punishment is to deliver the message that corporal punishment is a socially unacceptable method of raising children. How to deal with parents who violate the law can be determined according to the circumstances and severity of the incident, such as mandatory parent education and follow-up by social workers.

2. 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.

3. Strengthen support for families with children with special educational needs

Parents of children with special educational needs face greater pressure to care for and discipline their children, and are more likely to suffer from anxiety and emotional distress. According to the 2022 statistical report of the Child Protection Registry of the Social Welfare Department, among the 1,439 newly reported child protection cases, those with special educational needs ranked second (27.6%) in terms of risk factors related to abused children. ACA recommends that the government provides more appropriate resources and support for children with special educational needs and their families, especially in the aspect of mental health.

ACA strives to provide families with various preventive and remedial services, parent and



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community education activities, and also provides a parent-child support hotline: 27551122 for inquiries about services, seeking assistance or reporting suspected child abuse cases.

We hope that every day is “SpankOut Day”. Let’s create a safe, harmonious and caring society for children!

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Attachment

In the following 65 countries or states, children are protected by law from all corporal punishment:

| No. | Country/State | No. | Country/State |
|-----|---------------------|-----|--------------------|
| 1 | Sweden | 34 | South Sudan |
| 2 | Finland | 35 | Cabo Verde |
| 3 | Norway | 36 | Honduras |
| 4 | Austria | 37 | North Macedonia |
| 5 | Cyprus | 38 | Andorra |
| 6 | Denmark | 39 | Estonia |
| 7 | Latvia | 40 | Nicaragua |
| 8 | Croatia | 41 | San Marino |
| 9 | Germany | 42 | Argentina |
| 10 | Israel | 43 | Bolivia |
| 11 | Bulgaria | 44 | Brazil |
| 12 | Turkmenistan | 45 | Malta |
| 13 | Iceland | 46 | Benin |
| 14 | Romania | 47 | Ireland |
| 15 | Ukraine | 48 | Peru |
| 16 | Hungary | 49 | Mongolia |
| 17 | Greece | 50 | Montenegro |
| 18 | Togo | 51 | Paraguay |
| 19 | Spain | 52 | Slovenia |
| 20 | Venezuela | 53 | Lithuania |
| 21 | Uruguay | 54 | Nepal |
| 22 | Portugal | 55 | Georgia |
| 23 | New Zealand | 56 | South Africa |
| 24 | Netherlands | 57 | France |
| 25 | Liechtenstein | 58 | Republic of Kosovo |
| 26 | Luxembourg | 59 | Japan |
| 27 | Republic of Moldova | 60 | Seychelles |
| 28 | Costa Rica | 61 | Guinea |
| 29 | Albania | 62 | Republic of Korea |
| 30 | Congo (Republic of) | 63 | Colombia |
| 31 | Kenya | 64 | Zambia |
| 32 | Tunisia | 65 | Mauritius |
| 33 | Poland | | |

Source: <https://endcorporalpunishment.org/countdown/>